University of Alberta

Emptiness, the Emptiness of Emptiness: A Comparative Study of Nāgārjuna and Derrida

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Religious Studies

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2008

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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-46971-2
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-46971-2

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Abstract

This thesis examines Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and Derrida's theory of deconstruction, using the method of comparison. The comparison does not aim at demonstrating that the two thinkers, widely separated by time and place, declare the same thing. Instead, this study proposes that Derridean deconstruction can be used as a creative tool for understanding Nāgārjuna's emptiness in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, comparing the four philosophical systems of Nāgārjuna and Derrida, that is, emptiness/*différance*, dependent arising/the trace, the two truths/the two levels of deconstruction, and the middle way/the middle voice. This study includes the historical background of the philosophies of Nāgārjuna and Derrida, examining their dismantling of Indian ontology and Western metaphysics respectively. It concludes that Nāgārjuna's and Derrida's philosophies lead to redefining human relationships and contribute to a new ethical movement: the emphasis on compassion and responsibility.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Nāgārjuna is not only "the most philosophical figure in the Buddhist world after the historical Buddha himself"[1] but also at the center of comparative study with Western philosophers, such as Kant, Wittgenstein or Derrida. His personal life is little known; however, from historical and textual evidence he is believed to have lived in the 2nd century CE in south India. Even though it is common to believe that Nāgārjuna lived in the 2nd century CE, Ian Mabbett asserts that he may have lived later.[2] In addition, Richard Robinson claims that Nāgārjuna would have lived in the 3rd CE, based on Chinese biographies of him, including Kumārajīva's account.[3] According to Mabbett, not only is the century when Nāgārjuna lived unidentified, but there might be a possibility of plural Nāgārjunas, for example, Nāgārjuna I (the Mādhyamika), Nāgārjuna II (the tantric master), Nāgārjuna III (the magician) and so forth.[4] This may raise some debate about the authenticity of Nāgārjunian authorship. Mabbett explains that many legends, such as stories of Nāgārjuna the magician or hero in medieval Tibet and China, contributed to plural Nāgārjunas.[5] Despite the arguments over his identity, Nāgārjuna is a single historical figure who took ordination within one of four schools, the Mahasamghika, Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda or Sammatīya. In addition, he is the author of the *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā* and the founder and philosopher of the

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[1] Geshe Ngawang Samten and Jay L. Garfield, Translators' Introduction to *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), xix.

[2] Ian Mabbett, "The Problem of the Historical Nāgārjuna Revisited," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* vol. 118, no. 3 (1998): 333.

[3] Richard H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 25.

[4] Mabbett, "The Problem of the Historical Nāgārjuna Revisited," 333.

[5] Ibid., 337.

Madhyamaka, one of the two traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The name Madhyamaka (the Middle) indicates their theoretical position which, denying the two extremes of eternalism and annihilationism, is based on emptiness and the middle way (*madhyamā pratipad*). The Mādhyamika are often called the Śūnyatāvādin and Niḥsvabhāvavādin because of their doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and non-substantiality (*niḥsvabhāvatā*).[6] In addition, the fact that Nāgārjuna took ordination within one of the four schools indicates that the Madhyamaka was not a school itself but a movement. "The Madhyamaka was a philosophical outlook that, like the Mahāyāna in general, would have crossed the boundaries of the various ordination lineages of the Saṅgha."[7] According to Joseph Walser, since the Mahāyāna, including the Madhyamaka, was a new and minor movement which did not have its own monastery, Nāgārjuna's writing can be read as a kind of strategy to secure and preserve the movement.[8]

Nāgārjuna's writing and the Madhyamaka were based on new Buddhist texts, the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* (the Perfection of Wisdom texts), which appeared around the beginning of the Common Era and were produced in enormous editions, containing the "8,000 Line," "25,000 Line," "100,000 Line" sūtras and so forth. According to Robinson, it is Nāgārjuna who systematized the doctrines of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*.[9] In the *Prasannapadā*, Candrakīrti emphasizes the influence of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* on Nāgārjuna: "The holy master Nāgārjuna, having the

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[6] David S. Ruegg, *A History of Indian Literature: The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), 2.

[7] Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 238.

[8] Joseph Walser, *Nāgārjuna in Context: Mahāyana Buddhism and Early Indian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3.

[9] Robinson, 61.

method of Prajñāpāramitā as known without misconception, out of compassion in order to enlighten others composed the *Treatise*."[10] In addition, Lindtner claims that Nāgārjuna is "the first individual known to have collected the sūtras of the new school and systematized their teachings."[11] Ruegg points out the close relation between Nāgārjuna and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*: "In Buddhist tradition Nāgārjuna is linked closely with the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras, the Mahāyānist scriptures that devote much space to this theory; and he is indeed credited with having rescued parts of them from oblivion."[12] In other words, Nāgārjuna stresses the importance of interpreting Buddha's teaching in this new literary tradition of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras.* The main characteristic of this new literature is its radical doctrine, the emphasis on the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of every phenomenon, even including the Buddha's teaching. Therefore, *prajñā* (wisdom) is regarded as the *summum bonum*, not only because right understanding through *prajñā* leads the way to the bodhisattva but also because *prajñā* implies emptiness. It is said in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*:

> there is no ignorance and no cessation of ignorance . . . no suffering and no knowledge of suffering, no cause and no abandoning of the cause, no cessation and no realization of cessation, and no path and no development of the path . . . . It is in this sense, Śāriputra, that a bodhisattva, a great being who practises perfect wisdom, is called one devoted [to perfect wisdom].[13]

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[10] Cited in Robinson, 62.
[11] Chr. Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana*: *Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), 260.
[12] Ruegg, 6.
[13] Cited in Gethin, 236.

The bodhisattva, the most distinctive feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism, achieves bodhi when there is no ignorance. It is by means of the perfection of *prajñā* that there is no ignorance and no cessation of ignorance. According to Nāgārjuna, cessation of ignorance implies the realization of emptiness, that is, the lack of intrinsic nature of all phenomena. In brief, the appearance of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* gave rise to the Mahāyāna tradition and it was Nāgārjuna who provided a philosophical standpoint from which to understand emptiness in his masterpiece the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.

The *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way) is the philosophical treatise in which Nāgārjuna examines Buddha's teaching, using a radical and challenging method. Even if there is some debate about the authenticity of his authorship, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*MMK*) is regarded as one of the most profound and difficult texts in Buddhism. The *MMK* consists of four hundred and forty verses, and it was Candrakīrti who put it in order into twenty seven chapters in his commentary the *Prasannapadā* (Lucid Exposition) in the 7th century CE. In addition to the *Prasannapadā*, there are several major commentaries on the *MMK*: the *Akutobhayā*, whose authorship is anonymous; Pingala's commentary in a Chinese translation from the 4th century CE; Buddhapālita's *Buddhapālita* from the 5th or 6th century CE; Bhāvaviveka's *Prajñāpradipa* (Lamp of Wisdom) and *Tarkajvāla* (Blaze of Argument) from the 6th century CE; and The *rTsa she tik chen rigs p'ai rgya mtsho* (Ocean of Reasoning) of Tsong Khapa (1357-1419).[14]

[14] I am aware of versions from Sanskrit. However, I use Samten and Garfield's translation of Tsong Khapa's *Ocean of Reasoning* which according to the Translators' Introduction supersedes Garfield's earlier one (1995): "Finally, and most embarrassingly, there were errors in the translation of Garfield (1995). We have corrected them. We hereby jointly advise that this translation supersedes Garfield's earlier one (xxi)." I'm doing so on the recommendation of my supervisor.

What is interesting is that the study of Nāgārjuna has contributed to the understanding of Buddhist philosophy in the West by means of comparative study with modern European philosophy. Some of the comparative studies produce a biased and fixed perspective on the East as well as reflecting "Orientalism." In this thesis I will examine the philosophical affinities between Nāgārjuna's doctrines in the *MMK* and Derrida's theory of deconstruction. I hope that my comparative study will not show a preference for one side over the other, nor draw a reductive conclusion, such as a claim that Nāgārjuna and Derrida declare the same thing..My aim is to present some helpful tools, by means of comparison with Derridean deconstruction, for understanding Nāgārjuna's emptiness in the *MMK*.

The importance and the diversity of the study of Nāgārjuna have paralleled the varied acceptance of Buddhism in the West. According to Huntington, the understanding of Nāgārjuna has changed in the West during three periods of interpretation: a nihilistic, an absolutist and a linguistic interpretation.[15] The nihilistic interpretation of Buddhism originated from the introduction of translations of Buddhist texts into Europe in the nineteenth century. The first introduction of Buddhism to the West was in 1837, when Brian Hodgson (1800-94) transmitted Buddhist texts in Sanskrit and Tibetan to the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, the Royal Asiatic Society in London and the Société Asiatique in Paris. Then, Eugène Burnouf (1801-52), a teacher of Friedrich Max Müller, was handed Buddhist texts by the Société Asiatique in Paris, translated them into French and published his book *Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme indien* in 1844. This work contained a

[15] C. W. Huntington, Jr., *The Emptiness of Emptiness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 25-32.

negative view of Buddhist teachings as "naïve."[16] Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), one of the first philosophers who examined Buddhist philosophy in the West, sought an ahistorically universal wisdom in Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity in *The World as Will and Representation* (1844): "If we turn from the forms, produced by external circumstances, and go to the root of things, we shall find generally that Sakya Muni and Meister Eckhart teach the same thing; only that the former dared to express his ideas plainly and positively, whereas the latter is obliged to clothe them in the garment of the Christian myth, and to adapt his expressions thereto."[17] Schopenhauer's concern with the concept of *nirvāṇa* as "the negation of this world or of *Samsara*,"[18] as well as the association of his philosophy with pessimism or nihilism, contributed to pessimistic perspectives on Buddhism. In addition, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) displayed the influence of Buddhism in his writings. According to Clarke, we find two kinds of Buddhist theme in Nietzsche's writing: on the one hand, his association of Buddhism with pessimism; on the other hand, his concern about suffering in the psychological realm, "based on a strictly atheistic and pragmatic outlook, and avoiding the allure of metaphysical consolation."[19] For Nietzsche, Buddhism is a passive nihilism: "Its opposite: the weary nihilism that no longer attacks; its most famous form, Buddhism, a passive nihilism, a sign of weakness."[20] However, Nietzsche's understanding of Buddhism as well as Schopenhauer's is

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[16] J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), 74.

[17] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols. (New York: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1958), II: 614.

[18] Ibid., 608. He continued, "If *Nirvana* is defined as nothingness, this means only that *Samsara* contains no single element that could serve to define or construct nirvana (608)."

[19] Clarke, 79.

[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 18.

inaccurate, since he understood Buddhism "only in terms of his own cultural situation and historical orientation."[21] In other words, Westerners' interpretation of Buddhism as nihilism reflects their concern with social and cultural conditions, such as "the decadence of Christianity, the coldness of science, and the need to question all 'truths.'"[22]

Indeed, the nihilistic interpretation of Nāgārjuna by some scholars, for example A. B. Keith or Hendrick Kern, focused on the character of emptiness as a negative property, which was the result of comparing Buddhism with Christianity. Comparing it with Christianity's concept of an absolute and transcendental God, they interpreted emptiness as a lack of fullness. It is not strange that they rendered the Madhyamaka idea of emptiness in a negative way, because ancient Indians also criticized it as annihilation. The nihilistic interpretation began with the *MMK*, in which Nāgārjuna's interlocutor accused him: "If all this is empty, there would be neither arising nor ceasing, and for you, it follows that the Four Noble Truths do not exist."[23] Nāgārjuna provides his explanation of the right understanding of emptiness: "That which is dependent origination is explained to be emptiness. That, being a dependent designation, is itself the middle way."[24] Benjamin Elman points out that not only Nāgārjuna's interlocutors but also European critics, including Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, conclude from their misunderstanding of *śūnyatā* that Nāgārjuna's

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[21] Benjamin A. Elman, "Nietzsche and Buddhism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 44, no. 4 (1983): 684.

[22] Ibid., 678.

[23] Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 472.

[24] Ibid., 503.

philosophy is nihilism.[25] Concerning this nihilistic interpretation of Nāgārjuna and the Mādhyamika, Huntington suggests that without a cautious textual analysis it is difficult to differentiate "such a deconstructive approach from the nihilist's absolute denial of existence, knowledge, and meaning."[26]

The second phase is an absolutist view of the Madhyamaka. The representative scholars are Theodore Stcherbatsky and T. R. V. Murti. Stcherbatsky laid the cornerstone of comparative study between Western philosophy and Buddhism and moreover, he was the first to study Nāgārjuna in terms of neo-Kantian philosophy.[27] Murti, in *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, asserted that for the Mādhyamika the Absolute was not explained by the concept of Being or Consciousness but was equivalent to the *Tattva*, the Reality of all phenomena:

> The Mādhyamika is not a nihilist; only, he resists all attempts to determine what is essentially Indeterminate. The Absolute cannot even be identified with Being or Consciousness, as this would be to compromise its nature as the unconditioned ground of phenomena. The Tattva, however, is accepted by the Mādhyamika as the Reality of all things (dharmāṇām dharmatā), their essential nature (prakṛtir dharmāṇām). It is uniform and universal, neither decreasing, nor increasing, neither originating nor decaying. The Absolute alone is in itself (akṛtrima svabhāva). The Absolute is that intrinsic form in which

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[25] Elman, 682.
[26] Huntington, 30.
[27] Clarke, 113.

> things would appear to the clear vision of an Ārya (realised saint) free from ignorance.[28]

However, his interpretation that for the Mādhyamika all phenomena have an intrinsic nature such as the *Tattva* or the Reality contradicts the doctrine of emptiness in the Madhyamaka, in which everything including the doctrine of emptiness is devoid of intrinsic essence. Furthermore, Murti's view echoes Hindu concepts of ātman and Brahman as the fundamental ground of the universe. Huntington maintains that the Madhyamaka's language should be understood as "a radical attempt at abandoning the obsession with a metaphysical absolute that dominated the religious and philosophical thought of post-Upaniṣādic India."[29]

The third phase of interpretation of the Madhyamaka is the linguistic interpretation of several modern scholars, such as Streng, Gudmunsen, Gimello and so on. In *Wittgenstein and Buddhism*, Chris Gudmunsen points out that the early Abhidharma traditions, such as the Sarvāstivāda, were convinced of a so-called "correspondence theory" such that "all references to a dharma's 'own-being' are references to its actually existing."[30] On the contrary, according to Gudmunsen, the Mādhyamika criticized Abhidharma's correspondence theory.[31] Huntington expresses a strong agreement with their linguistic interpretations:

> The linguistic interpretation allows us to appreciate this seminal insight captured in all of the Mādhyamika's central concepts: Metaphysical

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[28] T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1960), 235.
[29] Huntington, 29.
[30] Chris Gudmunsen, *Wittgenstein and Buddhism* (London: the Macmillan Press Ltd, 1977), 6.
[31] Huntington, 31.

> language is incapable of justifying its claim to capture truth in a complex of ontological and epistemological propositions, for the objects to which it refers are entirely without practical consequences and are thus devoid of all reality. Equally important, it should be noted that this analysis has the effect of drawing our attention away from names and named objects and fixing it squarely upon the context in which they occur and the relations that obtain between them.[32]

The Madhyamaka's understanding of language as non-referential is similar to the views of language of structuralism and post-structuralism,[33] even though we cannot say that they share the same perspective of language due to the gap of culture and time.

Despite the danger of reductionism or prejudice, many scholars focus on the comparative method. Bernard Faure insists that "instead of seeking to reduce the one to the other, we might on the contrary make the most of the 'play' that exists between them and the difference in their perspectives, thereby introducing greater depth or relief into our field of study."[34] Andrew Tuck also points out that Western interpretation of Indian texts, such as Buddhist sūtras, has been focusing increasingly on the comparative study with Western philosophy despite its complications: "It is the

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[32] Huntington, 32.

[33] Structuralism began with Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). He suggests that the meaning of each word or each image is determined by the binary opposition in language, namely, the signifier and the signified, and that their relation is an arbitrary one. Therefore, the meaning of each word is not produced by its essential substance but by its difference from the other. On the other hand, while post-structuralists agree with the relation between the signifier and the signified, they refuse the binary system in language and try to deconstruct it by collapsing by means of deconstructive tools, such as Derrida's concept of *différance*. In sum, structuralists, for instance, Saussure, Lévi-Strauss or Roman Jakobson, and post-structuralists, such as Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan or Julia Kristeva share the stance that there is no correspondence theory between reality and language and there is only relation and difference.

[34] Bernard Faure, *Double Exposure: Cutting Across Buddhist and Western Discourses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 6.

difference between declaring that something essential and immutable has been 'discovered' about the ideas contained in these texts, on the one hand, and on the other, constructing a context in which two intellectual traditions can be understood together."[35] On the other hand, concerning the interpretation of Indian texts, Tuck insists that comparison is intrinsically subjective since "every reading of a text – including, of course, the most carefully contextualized and historicised reading, will, in some way, be unavoidably determined by some set of prejudgements."[36] Therefore, isogesis is inevitable in cross-cultural comparison: "[I]t is undeniable that readers of Indian texts unwittingly engage in a kind of *isogesis*, a 'reading into' the text that often reveals as much about the interpreter as it does about the text being interpreted. Isogesis is an unconscious phenomenon, whereas exegesis is simply conscious intent."[37] In regard to scholarship on Nāgārjuna in the 20th century, Richard Hayes points out that there are two kinds of interpretation, exegesis and hermeneutics: "Exegesis tends to be confined mostly to the accumulation and ordering of philological, historical and textual data, while hermeneutics attempts to make those data not only intelligible but also relevant to the concerns of people in the present."[38] Hayes agrees with Tuck's assertion that some scholarship on Nāgārjuna in the 20th century, for example, Stcherbastsky, Murti, Magliola and Huntington, reflects "trends

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[35] Andrew Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10-11.
[36] Tuck, vi.
[37] Ibid., 9-10.
[38] Richard P. Hayes, "Nāgārjuna's Appeal," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22 (1994): 362.

in nineteenth and twentieth century European thinking," while the works of Robinson, Ruegg, and Williams look "more exegetical than isogetical."[39]

If a comparative study is inevitably damaged by prejudgement, "the choice between one reading and an even better reading is a difference in degree and not in kind."[40] Therefore, for "better reading," we should consider the historical aspect when we perform a comparative study. Donald Lopez criticizes ahistorical comparative study: "Comparative philosophy is ahistorical in the sense that it neglects the complex of social, political, and material forces that modify the individual (whether it be Dōgen or the comparative philosopher) and the community (whether it be the community of Buddhist clerics in thirteenth-century Japan or the community of academics in an American institution of higher learning) 'in a succession of experienced presents.'"[41]

Besides this ahistorical concern, there are other problems when interpreting the comparative culture of the Other, such as Orientalism. Orientalism refers to a long-time biased view about the Orient: "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."[42] In Almond's *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, the Victorian interpretation of Buddhism is explained

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[39] Hayes, 362.
[40] Tuck, vi.
[41] Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Elaboration on Emptiness* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 247.
[42] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1-2.

as "the creation of Buddhism," based on the Western imagination as well as political agendas, such as imperialism:

> On the contrary, what we are witnessing in the period from the later part of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the Victorian period in the latter half of the 1830s is the *creation* of Buddhism. It *becomes* an object, is constituted as such; it takes form as an entity that 'exists' over against various cultures which can now be perceived as instancing it, manifesting it, in an enormous variety of ways.[43]

For instance, in the early Western interpretation of Buddhism, Buddhism was viewed as a counterpart of Christianity. Marco Polo considered the Buddha as a version of a saint, and Jules Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire (1805-95), in his book *Le Bouddha et sa religion* (1858), suggested that "with the sole exception of Christ, there does not exist among the founders of religions a purer and more touching figure than that of the Buddha."[44] Monier-Williams (1819-1899), a professor at Oxford University and author of a Sanskrit-English dictionary, claimed that the number of Buddhists was doomed to decline, just as it disappeared from India: "I hold that the Buddhism, described in the following pages, contained within itself, from the earliest times, the germs of disease, decay, and death . . . and that its present condition is one of rapidly increasing disintegration and decline. We must not forget that Buddhism has disappeared from India proper, although it dominates in Ceylon and Burma, and although a few Buddhist travellers find their way back to the land of its origin and

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[43] Cited in Jonathan A. Silk, "The Victorian Creation of Buddhism," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22 (1994): 174.

[44] Cited in Clarke, 75.

sojourn there."[45] T. W. R. Rhys Davids (1843-1922), who founded the Pali Text Society with his wife, Caroline Rhys Davids, tried to find some parallel between Buddhism and Christianity: "Future investigations will give us fuller details regarding early Buddhism, and both greater exactness and greater certainty regarding the life of its founder, and they will above all enable us to follow clearly the development of Buddhism which runs so remarkably parallel with that of Christianity."[46] In *The History and Literature of Buddhism* (1896), concerning the relation between Buddhism and Theosophy he emphasized that Buddhism is not esoteric: "In this connection I shall doubtless be expected to say a few words on Theosophy, if only because one of the books giving an account of that very curious and widely spread movement has been called *Esoteric Buddhism*. . . . The original Buddhism was the very contrary of esoteric."[47] Even though he contributed to the Western understanding of Buddhism as a world religion[48] and to the publication of most Pali Buddhist texts, Rhys Davids, a famous Buddhologist as well as a government officer who was discharged for corruption from colonial Sri Lanka, raises some questions about "the interrelationships of interpreters and the subjects of interpretation."[49] Tomoko

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[45] Monier-Williams, *Buddhism in its Connexion with Brāhmanism and Hindūism, and in Its Contrast with Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1964), xv-xvi.

[46] T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhism: Being a Sketch of the Life and Teachings of Gautama, the Buddha* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1925), 9.

[47] T. W. Rhys Davids, *The History and Literature of Buddhism*, 5th ed. (Calcutta: Susil Gupta (India) Private Ltd., 1962), 140.

[48] According to Tomoko Masuzawa, in the nineteenth century two types of criteria were formulated to define a world religion (*Weltreligion*): the name of a historical founder of the religious tradition and a distinct and unique religious text, which can be called a canon. All religions met these criteria except Hinduism and Shinto. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 132-3.

[49] Charles Hallisey, review of *The Genesis of an Orientalist: Thomas William Rhys Davids in Sri Lanka*, by L. Ananda Wicremeratne, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 107, no. 3 (1987): 514.

Masuzawa points out that these concerns about the number of Buddhists or the relation between Christianity and Buddhism (e.g. Theosophy and esoteric Buddhism) derived from "the disturbing suspicion" that Buddhism might be the oldest universal religion and might therefore influence characteristics of Christianity.[50]

On the other hand, according to Bernard Faure, we see two kinds of perspective on Buddhism since the end of the nineteenth century:

> Western discourse, frequently characterized either by a primary Orientalism (that is to say, a reductionist view of Eastern "otherness") or else by a secondary Orientalism (an exotic idealization of that otherness), and national variants of Asian discourse, either Tibetan or Japanese, themselves often impregnated by second-degree Orientalism (reacting against Western discourse, but still influenced by it).[51]

Concerning Asian discourse characterized by second-degree Orientalism, Faure asserts that some scholars emphasize "the superiority of Eastern thought, suggesting it to be a panacea for all the ills of the West."[52] For instance, D. T. Suzuki, in *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (1957), praised Zen Buddhism in order to show Eastern superiority over the West by means of an analogy between Zen and Meister Eckhart: "Eckhart's statement regarding God's self-love which 'contains his love for the whole world' corresponds in a way to the Buddhist idea of universal enlightenment. When Buddha attained the enlightenment, it is recorded, he perceived that all beings nonsentient as well as sentient were already in the enlightenment itself. The idea of

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[50] Masuzawa, 140.
[51] Faure, 5.
[52] Ibid., 6.

enlightenment may make Buddhists appear in some respects more impersonal and metaphysical than Christians. Buddhism thus may be considered more scientific and rational than Christianity which is heavily laden with all sorts of mythological paraphernalia."[53] Faure considers this comparison of Suzuki's as "Oriental trapping": "Yet many aspects of the Zen experience, as he describes it to his American disciples, are simply Japanese adaptations of the Christian 'mystical experience,' which his fascinated interlocutors are unable to recognize beneath its 'Oriental trapping.'"[54] In addition, Lopez notes that some comparative studies between Buddhism and Western philosophy have been developed through Romantic Orientalism or late colonial discourse:

> In the Kyoto School in Japan, Nietzsche and Heidegger are surpassed only by Dōgen. It is important to note that this latter tendency is a product of late colonialism, in which European-educated elite males of the colony read Western philosophical works, found affinities with their native philosophies (which they sometimes encountered for the first time in European translation), and eventually came to proclaim the priority (both temporal and millennium) and superseded a particular development of European philosophy. Hence, an Asian, usually the Buddha or Nāgārjuna or Dōgen, was already a pragmatist or a phenomenologist or an existentialist or a deconstructionist long before the term was even coined in the West.[55]

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[53] D.T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (New York: Routledge, 1957), 6.
[54] Faure, 6.
[55] Lopez, 249-250.

At this point, it would be helpful to trace the method of "comparison" of scholarship. The comparative approach in the humanities has been used since the nineteenth century in Europe, for instance the "comparative linguistics" of F. Bopp, the "comparative anthropology" of Wilhelm von Humboldt, or the "comparative theology" of Max Müller.[56] However, Wilhelm Halbfass asserts that the term "comparative philosophy" was introduced in the works of Indian scholar Brajendranath Seal, *Comparative Studies in Vaishnavism and Christianity* (1899) and *The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus* (1915). In *Comparative Studies in Vaishnavism and Christianity*, Seal said: "Chinese, Hindoo, Mohamedan culture-histories, therefore, require to be worked out on a general historic plan, and in obedience to a general law of process…this will furnish new and comprehensive material for more correct generalisations, - for the discovery of general laws of the social organism... It will bring new influences, new inspirations, new cultures to Europe. It will infuse new blood, the blood of Humanity, and bring on the greater European Renaissance of the coming century."[57] Halbfass maintains that in the very center of Seal's term of comparison there is a claim for the universality of Hinduism which enables it to encompass Western thinking: "It is obvious that B.N. Seal's proclamation of comparative studies has an apologetic function. It is a device for defending the dignity of the Indian tradition against the challenges of Western thought and its claims of superiority and domination. More specifically and explicitly, Seal argues against Hegel's scheme of historically subordinating the Indian and other

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[56] Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: State of University of New York Press, 1988), 420.

[57] Cited in Halbfass, 423.

Oriental traditions to the European standpoint, emphasizing that comparison in the proper sense requires objects which are of 'co-ordinate rank.'"[58] Lopez also criticizes Seal's apologetic position as Romantic Orientalism or late colonial discourse in which the colonized tries to show its originality and pre-eminence over the colonizer with "the strategy of legitimation through association."[59]

As Lopez mentions, if one could draw a whole picture of Nāgārjuna by reading all his texts, one would never conclude that Nāgārjuna is a deconstructionist;[60] it is a difficult task to compare two different ways of thinking, especially with different backgrounds of time and place. Then is it impossible to perform a comparison between Western and Eastern systems of thought? Encountering both a dilemma and a challenge in comparative study, Lopez claims that we should consider some points:

> The first requirement is that we examine our chosen text or topic within as broad a historical context as possible. . .The second requirement is that we examine not only our text or topic but the history of its study, not only in Asia but also in the West, again attending to the circumstances that led to a particular text coming under Western scrutiny or remaining hidden from the Buddhological gaze. . . The third requirement is the scholar's critical estimation of his or her own situation in the entire process; an examination of the position from

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[58] Halbfass, 424.
[59] Lopez, 252.
[60] Ibid., 251-2.

which we speak, the historical conditions from which we emerge as scholarly agents.[61]

As Gethin maintains, "Of all Buddhist thinkers, it is Nāgārjuna who has repeatedly captured the modern imagination."[62] Nāgārjuna has been compared with Western philosophers from Kant to Wittgenstein to Derrida. On the other hand, Derrida has also been a connection between the West and the East: "As a potential new point of engagement for Indian philosophy with the West, Derrida offers several areas of interest."[63] If we do not try to declare that Nāgārjuna and Derrida are the same kind of deconstructionists, the comparative study of Nāgārjuna and Derrida will help to understand the one of them which is unfamiliar. In the following chapters, I will propose that Derridean deconstruction theory can be used as a creative tool for understanding Nāgārjuna's emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in the *MMK*.

In the first section of the first chapter, I will scrutinize the historical background of the philosophies of Nāgārjuna and Derrida in terms of ontology and metaphysics pervasive in the East and the West, in order to understand the complexity of the teaching of the two philosophers. First of all, this chapter looks at the main doctrine of Buddhism with regard to its difference from the brahmanical tradition of substantiality and eternality of the self since Siddhārtha Gautama's denial of the concept of *ātman* made a claim for *anātman* and the emptiness of all phenomena. In addition, it surveys anti-logocentric elements in early Buddhism. The Buddha did not place authority on language but on meaning, while the authority of speech over written language was one

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[61] Ibid., 255-6.
[62] Gethin, 244.
[63] Coward, 11.

of the basic biases of the brahmanical tradition. Then, I will examine the historical development and change in Buddhist doctrines of emptiness, especially in two early Buddhist schools, the Sarvāstivāda and the Theravāda with respect to the Abhidharma literature. Next, I will focus on the emergence of a new Buddhist movement, the Mahāyāna, and its most prominent figure, Nāgārjuna and his re-emphasis on emptiness. It will also include Joseph Walser's theory that Nāgārjuna was a strategist who attempted to secure this new movement through support with audiences of the *MMK*. In the second section of the first chapter, I will survey Western metaphysics and Derridean deconstruction. First of all, this section will look at ontological elements in Western philosophy, which has sought for the pure and transcendental signifier as a name of Being since Plato and Aristotle. Then I will survey two main characteristics in Western metaphysics, that is, logocentrism and the binary system which privileges one over the other, for instance speech over writing. Next, this section will examine previous attempts to reveal logocentrism and the binary system in Western metaphysics, for example that of Saussure. Then I will focus on the Derridean dismantling of metaphysical elements through a new tool for interpreting texts, that is, *différance*, a neologism by Derrida. Moreover, it will include the ethical concept of debt and responsibility which derives from *différance*.

The second chapter looks at the comparative study of Nāgārjuna's emptiness in the *MMK* and Derrida's *différance* in four specific areas. The first section of this chapter will focus on Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* and Derrida's *différance*. It surveys the way that each concept of Nāgārjuna and Derrida escapes ontological metaphysics in light of the fact that each denies any absolute and transcendental signifier: Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā*

denotes the emptiness of all phenomena, and even the emptiness of emptiness; Derrida's *différance* analyzes the relationship of signifier and signified and even denies its fixed identity itself. This section will include the linguistic analysis of Nāgārjuna and Derrida. The next section will look at dependent arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*) and the trace, which support the concepts of *śūnyatā* and *différance*. In the *MMK* Nāgārjuna analyzes dependent arising as an equation with *śūnyatā* on the grounds that it shows a dynamic relationship between cause and effect and denies substantial entities through its nature of interdependence and interconnectedness. Derrida's concept of the trace undoes the metaphysical search for the origin by revealing an absent and deferred origin of the truth. In short, the second section will examine how dependent arising and the trace dismantle the binary systems of cause and effect, and the signifier and the signified respectively. In the third section of the second chapter, I will examine two levels of understanding of everyday life in Nāgārjuna and Derrida, and their understanding of the usage of language. This section looks at the two truths of Nāgārjuna, that is, conventional truth and ultimate truth, and shows how Nāgārjuna interprets the two truths to accept ordinary life and at the same time to perceive the emptiness of emptiness. In addition, it will include Derrida's two levels of understanding of deconstruction and will show how Derrida dismantles metaphysics through the interesting tool of metaphysical logocentrism. The fourth section will look at the middle way of Nāgārjuna and "the middle voice" of Derrida. I will examine how Nāgārjuna and Derrida search for mutual dependency and non-dualism through escaping the trap of ontological thinking in the concept of the middle.

Furthermore, it includes Roger Jackson's further interpretation of the middle way as a middling point between foundationalism and deconstruction.

In conclusion, I will examine what Nāgārjuna and Derrida's deconstructive philosophies aim at, if their philosophies are not to remain in the theoretical realm. I will look at how their philosophies contribute to a novel ethical movement, on the grounds that their dismantling of ontological and metaphysical views in their respective eras lead to rethinking and redefining human relationships, that is, the emphasis on responsibility and compassion.

Chapter 2: Historical Contexts of Nāgārjuna and Derrida

In addition to the philosophical elements which I will survey in the next chapter, I will examine here one of the interesting affinities of Nāgārjuna and Derrida in its historical context. That is, Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness emerged in reaction to the ontological elements of Indian philosophy, and in a similar way, Derrida's philosophy was directed against Western metaphysics.

Before analysing the philosophical affinities between them, this historical survey is important for understanding the complexity of the teaching of the two philosophers. Especially when we compare two totally different theories of the East and the West, we should be concerned with the historical comparative analysis. However, many studies neglect "the complex of social, political, and material forces:"[64]

> The question of what it can possibly mean to do comparative philosophy in the age of historical contextualization has begun to be considered by others. The most obvious problem with comparative philosophy as it has been practiced, in both Asia and the West, is its ahistorical nature, portraying the concern of certain types of Asian texts as manifestations of perennial philosophical forms. To the extent that history is evoked, it is a history of ideas, a transindividual, transcommunal, transcultural, and transtemporal movement, often toward a particular telos.[65]

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[64] Lopez, 247.
[65] Ibid., 246-7.

In this chapter, I will analyze the socio-religious contexts of Indian ontology and Western metaphysics, and the emergence of Nāgārjuna's thought and Derrida's philosophy as reactions to the onto-theology of their eras.

a) Indian Ontology and Nāgārjuna

To begin, according to K. Satchidananda Murty's *Philosophy in India*, Indian philosophy has three specific conceptions: *ānvikṣiki*, the concept that philosophy is the review of theology; *darśana*, the view that philosophy is a system consisting of other fields such as ethics, epistemology and so on; and popular philosophy, the idea that philosophy is regarded as a perceptive system which enables the understanding of gods, deity or destiny.[66] In this chapter, the first two concepts will be applied. Ontology in the philosophical system is "the aspect of metaphysics aiming to characterize Reality by identifying all its essential categories and setting forth the relations among them."[67] In Indian philosophy, ontology is concerned with the *ātman*: anything regarded as "the subject of all feelings, thought, and wishes."[68] Thus, the ultimate aim of the brahmanical teaching is to understand the nature of reality and realize the *ātman.* Indeed, the Upaniṣādic tradition is based on this realization of the true self which is "the unchanging constant underlying all our various and unstable

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[66] Coward, 5.
[67] *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., s.v. "ontology."
[68] Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 205. Klostermaier also claims that the translation of *ātman* as "soul" is an example of the Western misunderstanding of Indian philosophy (206).

experiences."[69] While the Vedic tradition is dedicated to sacrificial ritual to sustain the universal order, in the Upaniṣādic tradition the central concern is "the knowledge of, and path to, *ātman* and *Brahman*."[70]

The teaching of Siddhārtha Gautama (c. 563-485 BCE) dismantled the *ātman*-based ontology in the brahmanical tradition. The first teaching of the Buddha in a deer park outside Benares was the Four Noble Truths: all conditioned existence is suffering; the origin of suffering is ignorant attachment; cessation of suffering is *nirvāṇa*; the way of achieving *nirvāṇa* is the noble Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths are important for some scholars in the West in that they are one of the pieces of evidence on which Buddhism is defined as a religion. For example, Emile Durkheim points out that the Four Noble Truths make Buddhism a religion even though the idea of gods and spirits is absent in Buddhism: "The entire essence of Buddhism is contained in four propositions that the faithful call the Four Noble Truths."[71] In addition, it is *pratītya-samutpāda*, dependent arising, upon which every Buddhist doctrine is based, including the Four Noble Truths, and through which the Buddha achieves enlightenment. *Pratītya-samutpāda* refers to the links, mostly a set of twelve factors, through which all things are connected. These twelve factors are interrelated and conditioned by each other: ignorance, the presupposition of the whole process; the interrelation of the act of will and the mind; consciousness; the human entity, composed of five aggregates; the six sensory organs; contact between each organ;

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[69] Gethin, 134.
[70] Klostermaier, 204.
[71] Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 28.

sensation; craving for sensation; attachment to life; becoming, existence or survival; another birth; finally, old age and death. This dependent arising is totally opposed to the Vedic and Upaniṣādic traditions in denying fixed and substantial entities. According to dependent arising, nothing is permanent and therefore, the existence of anything eternal and transcendental is impossible. Indeed, in the teaching of the Buddha, there is no creator deity or ultimate Absolute. In the *Majjhima-Nikāya* (The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings), one of the early Buddhist discourses, the Buddha explains the wrong view of the self when he discourses on the ways of controlling *āsrava*, the "binding influence" of pollutants:

> To one who does not pay wise attention in these ways, one of six (wrong) views arises: 'There is for me a self' – the view arises to him as though it were true, as though it were real. Or 'There is not for me a self.' . . . Or, 'Simply by self am I aware of self.' . . . Or, 'Simply by not-self am I aware of self' – the view arises to him as though it were true, as though it were real. Or a wrong view occurs to him thus: 'Whatever is this self for me that speaks, that experiences and knows, that experiences now here, now there, the fruition of deeds that are lovely and that are depraved, it is this self for me that is permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change, that will stand firm like unto the eternal.' This, monks, is called going to wrong views, holding wrong

> views, the wilds of wrong views, the wriggling of wrong views, the scuffing of wrong views, the fetter of wrong views.[72]

In a word, the Buddha discards any "transcendental-signified, including any 'hyperessentialism'"[73] by refuting the brahmanical teaching of the eternal self.

In addition, we find a distinctive view of the relation between speech and writing in the brahmanical tradition. For instance, *vāk*, which means speech or voice, is also the name of a goddess of speech. Moreover, *vāk* is a mother of the Vedas and wife of Indra, which implies that it manifests the god-like logos. The name Veda is drawn from the word *vid*, "to know." Therefore, in "Changing Conceptions of the Veda: From Speech-Acts to Magical Sounds," Madhav M. Deshpande asserts that the Vedic texts were "viewed as being verbal expressions of sacred knowledge."[74] In the Vedic tradition, speaking is a sacred activity because "words were the principal means to approach the gods who dwell in a different sphere."[75] On the other hand, writing is regarded as a profane activity.[76] As a result, from the point of view of Derrida's theory of deconstruction, the brahmanical tradition is based on logocentrism as is Western metaphysics:

> When we analyze the place of spoken and written scripture in Indian philosophy and religion, it is evident that the *āstika* or orthodox schools (with the exception of the Grammarian school) largely share the same

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[72] I. B. Horner, trans. *The Collection of the Middle Length Saying* (*Majjhima-Nikāya*) (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), 11-2.

[73] David Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 228.

[74] Cited in Klostermaier, 76.

[75] Klostermaier, 76.

[76] Ibid., 77.

> logocentric biases toward Being and Speech and against writing as those described by Derrida as typical of Western metaphysics.[77]

Buddhism is free from this logocentric bias since "it would claim to steer clear of giving either speech or writing a privileged position."[78] On the other hand, early Buddhist scriptures were not written but recited for a long time, which might suggest an emphasis on the means of speech rather than writing. However, that is because "Buddha's attitude seems to have been very open and flexible, everyone was allowed to recite the scriptures in his or her own dialect – which did not make for a standardized oral and written form."[79] *Vinayapiṭaka* 2:139 shows that the Buddha rejects authoritative forms of language:

> Two monks, Brahmans by birth, were troubled that other monks of various clans, tribes, and families, were corrupting the Buddha's words by repeating them each in his own dialect (*sakāya niruttiyā*). They asked the Buddha, "Let us put the Buddha's words into [Vedic-Sanskrit] verse (*chandaso āropema*). But the Blessed One, the Buddha, rebuked them, saying, "Deluded men! This will not lead to the conversion of the unconverted . . ." And he commanded (all) the monks: "You are not to put the Buddha's words into [Vedic-Sanskrit] verse. To do this would be to commit an infraction. I authorize you, monks, to learn the Buddha's wolds each in his own dialect."[80]

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[77] Coward, 128-9.
[78] Ibid., 129.
[79] Ibid., 130.
[80] Cited in Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 54.

Therefore, the word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) was recited in the various Middle Indo-Aryan dialects, for example, Gandhari in the north of India or Sogdian and Tocharian in western and central Asia.[81] Moreover, Pali, an ancient language which was related to Sanskrit, was invented as "a hybrid, preserving linguistic features of several dialects and showing some evidence of sanskritization"[82] since the Buddha deliberately avoided Sanskrit.

There exists only one complete "canon"[83] of Indic Buddhist tradition: the Pali Canon of the Theravāda of Sri Lanka and south-East Asia. However, it does not signify that the Pali Canon is the only original "canon": there exist Chinese and Tibetan translations in part. Each canon, or collection of authoritative works of Buddhist discourse, has "three baskets" (*Tripiṭaka*): the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (basket of monastic discipline), the *Sūtra Piṭaka* (basket of the discourses), and the *Abhidharma piṭaka* (basket of higher Dharma). This implies that Buddhist traditions do not have one absolute canon comparable to that of other religions. Since the Buddha rejects the authority of the Vedas and intellectual knowledge, early Buddhist traditions are "anti-essentialist" or "non-logocentric."[84]

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[81] Pollock, 55.

[82] Gethin, 42. The word Pāli draws from *pāli-bhāsā*, "the language of the [Buddhist] texts (Gethin, 41)."

[83] We notice that Buddhist sūtras begin with "Thus have I heard. Once the Lord was staying. . ." It means that all Buddhist sūtras as "the word of the Buddha" (*buddha-vacana*) are not presented by the Buddha in person. Indeed, the words of monks and nuns are included in sūtras. Therefore, "the notion of a fixed canon of Buddhist scriptures is somewhat problematic. And we must be careful not to impose inappropriate notions of 'canon' and authenticity – derived, say, from Christianity – on the Buddhist tradition (Gethin, 46)."

[84] Roger R. Jackson, "Deconstructive and Foundationalist Tendencies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism," in *Buddhisms and Deconstructions*, ed. Jin Y. Park (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 93.

When the Buddha died after forty-five years of teaching, he did not choose his successor but said: "Ānanda, it may be that you will think: 'The Teacher's instruction has ceased, now we have no teacher!' It should not be seen like this, Ānanda, for what I have taught and explained to you as Dhamma and discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher."[85] We find that Dharma (Pali Dhamma), historically, is interpreted in many different ways in early Buddhist formations. Etymologically, dharma is derived from the root *dhṛ*-, "to sustain" or "to uphold" and furthermore, it has the same meaning as religion.[86] Dharma is one of the most important concepts in Indian religions including Buddhism. In the brahmanical tradition it has two aspects: righteousness and duty, and the objective order of the universe.[87] On the other hand, in Buddhist traditions, it has multiple meanings: the teaching of the Buddha, the corpus of discourses, the truth about the phenomenal world, morality, the second of the "three jewels" (the Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha) and the factors or constituents of the dharma.[88] Some Buddhist schools have their own distinctive views of the dharma as the constituents of phenomena. The variety of perspectives on the dharma as "phenomenon," "factors," or elements of entities in Buddhist traditions derives not from different doctrines but from the different forms of monastic conduct, since the early Buddhist schools are distinguished not by doctrines but by monastic rules.

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[85] Maurice Walshe, trans. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 269-270.

[86] Klostermaier, 49-50.

[87] Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 15.

[88] *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. "dharma and dharmas."

There were about 18 various Buddhist schools[89] in India after the second Buddhist council in Vaiśālī (c. 383 BCE). Various divisions of early Buddhist tradition were inevitable as Buddhism spread across the Indian subcontinent. As a consequence of the growing Buddhist community, namely the Saṅgha, various schools resulted not from different views of Buddhist doctrine, but from different interpretations of the Vinaya, that is, monastic discipline:

> Since the Vinaya left monks and nuns largely free to develop the Buddha's teaching doctrinally as they saw fit, there would be little incentive to provoke a schism on purely doctrinal grounds. What was of public concern was living by the monastic rules, not doctrinal conformity. We are dealing here with orthopraxy, not orthodoxy.[90]

Since each school was divided according to its different monastic rule, there was no great schism such as is found in the history of Christianity. In other words, there was no source of conflict among schools, such as the problem of orthodoxy or heresy; rather, monks in one school could communicate with other schools legitimately. Each school in mainstream Buddhism was named according to a specific teacher (e.g. Dharmaguptaka, "those affiliated with Dharmagupta"), geographical location (e.g. Haimavata, "those of the snowy mountains"), or distinctive doctrinal position (e.g. Sautrāntika, "those who rely upon the sūtra"; Sarvāstivāda, "those who claim that all exist").[91] Among many mainstream Buddhist schools, three lineages of Vinaya remain

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[89] Traditional sources assert 18 schools, but more than 30 schools are recorded. Therefore, the number 18 is symbolic. These earliest Buddhism of 18 schools refers to Nikāya Buddhism or mainstream Buddhism. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. "mainstream Buddhist schools."

[90] Gethin, 50-51.

[91] *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. "mainstream Buddhist schools."

today: Pali Theravāda Vinaya in Sri Lanka and South-East Asia; Dharmaguptaka Vinaya in China, Korea and Japan; Mūlasarvāstivāda, an offshoot of Sarvāstivāda, in Tibet and Mongolia.

As mentioned above, the various Buddhist schools appeared according to their different Vinaya and I will examine the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda's views of dharmas in their Abhidharma literature. The Abhidharma or "Higher Dharma" originally refers to the exegesis of *sūtras* and systemically refers to the third *piṭaka* of the *Tripiṭaka.* Traditional understanding distinguishes the Abhidharma from *sūtras* as follows: the Abhidharma presents the Buddha's teaching in general terms under general circumstances, while *sūtras* contain the Buddha's teaching in specific circumstances, such as detailed times and places. The Abhidharma literature is understood as "the earliest attempt to give a full and systematic statement of the Buddha's teaching on the basis of what is contained in his discourse."[92] The Abhihdarma collections of the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda remain in Pali and Sanskrit respectively. The Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda have seven books of Abhidharma but they are different: the Theravāda Abhidharma collections mainly consist of explanation of the words of the Buddha, while the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma collections are attributed to elders as compilers of the canon.

If the main teaching of the Buddha was to distinguish between the way things appear to be and the way they actually are, after the Buddha's death this approach developed further. On the basis of the distinction between reality and appearance, the Buddha refuted the brahmanical notion of the *ātman* and insisted on *anātman.*

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[92] Gethin, 48.

Furthermore, he pronounced that a human is a flow of the five aggregates (*skandhas*): material form (*rūpa*), sensations (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saṃjñā*), formations or volitional forces (*saṃskāra*) and consciousness (*vijñāna*). According to the Buddha, even these five aggregates do not have any substance; they are impermanent (*anitya*), suffering (*duḥkha*), and lack essence (*anātman*). The Buddha applied these doctrines universally to all things, as well as to sentient beings. It was the Abhidharma that focused on the analysis of the five aggregates into a plurality of elements, namely dharmas.[93] Furthermore, the Abhidharma discourses began to add their own reductive analysis. The Abhidharma do not regard each aggregate itself as a dharma because many other elements are classified under each aggregate; on the other hand, solidity in earth is irreducible and therefore it is referred as a dharma. In other words, the Abhidharma literatures analyze the irreducible elements, that is, dharmas, as what is really there.[94]

The Theravāda, "advocates of the doctrine of elders," classified the dharma into 81 conditioned dharmas and one unconditioned dharma, namely *nirvāṇa*. Moreover, this school insists that every physical and mental dharma has its own characteristics. Paul Williams criticizes the Theravāda for being too attached to dharma to comprehend its ontological nature:

> … I would argue with any reading of Abhidharma which would interpret its concern to be solely with practical issues of how to lessen attachment in opposition to the ontology of how things really, truly, are. I have already suggested that there is no such opposition in (Indian)

[93] Williams, 88-9.
[94] Ibid., 90.

> Buddhism. Abhidhamma analysis does indeed involve seeing things as they are, and that is a matter of ontology. The dhammas (excluding, of course, nibbāna) are evanescent events, linked by an impersonal causal law. That is how it truly is. … What is involved in seeing dhamma as events, in seeing all as based perhaps on an event-ontology, rather than a substance-ontology, seems to be relatively unexplored in the Pāli Abhidhamma or indeed in the Theravāda thought which follows it.[95]

Moreover, the definition of the dharma shows that ontology of the dharma is important in the Theravāda: "Dhammas are so called because they hold (*dhārentī*) their own-existence (*svabhāva*)."[96] In addition to the Theravāda, another Abhidharma tradition, the Sarvāstivāda, "advocates of the doctrine that all things exist in the past, present, and future," classified 75 dharmas by reduction and explored them through an ontology of the dharma. This school understood that dharmas existed temporarily in the past, present and future and it attributed to the dharmas a continuing fundamental "essence." In a word, the doctrine of the non-self and the non-substance was changed in the prevailing Abhidharma traditions since the Abhidharma literatures considered dharma an irreducible substantial element. According to Williams, an ontological view of dharma began with the Abhidharma: "Issues of ontology in Buddhist thought take place, it seems to me, within the context of debates which are first and foremost broadly those of Abhidharma."[97]

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[95] Williams, 91-2.
[96] Ibid., 124.
[97] Ibid., 161.

A new movement, Mahāyāna Buddhism, began to appear around the first or second century CE. The Mahāyāna, or "Great Vehicle," was not a sect or school, but a movement whose ultimate aim was to attain perfect Buddhahood and practice the bodhisattva paths for the benefit of all sentient beings. Monks who followed this new movement belonged to different schools according to their different monastic rules (Vinaya). Therefore, the Mahāyāna, being a movement not a sect, did not have its own monastic rule. This movement accompanied new scriptures known as the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* (the Perfection of Wisdom texts) which focused on the "perfection of wisdom" (*prajñāpāramitā*) as one of the paths to attain Buddhahood. The distinguishing philosophy of the Mahāyāna was that first of all, it criticized the idea of the substantial dharma of the Abhidharma; secondly, it emphasized "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) as the perfection of wisdom; and thirdly, it considered dependent arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*) as the conventional approach of existence. Emptiness, the main theme in the Perfection of Wisdom literature, was also presented in earlier texts, such as Nikāya/Āgamas[98] and the Abhidharma texts, but it was Nāgārjuna who emphasized it as the hallmark of Buddhist thought[99] in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

[98] Nikāya is the four collections of the Buddha's discourse or *sūtra* in the Pali version, and Āgamas in Chinese version: the collection of long discourses (*dīgha-nikāya/dīrghāgama*), the collection of middle-length discourses (*majjhima-nikāya/madhyamāgama*), the grouped collection (*saṃyutta-nikāya/saṃyuktāgama*) and the numbered collection (*aṅguttara-nikāya /ekottarikāgama*). They are one *piṭaka* (basket) of *Tripiṭaka* (three baskets).

[99] Gethin, 237.

Nāgārjuna, who followed the tradition of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and the Mahāyāna, was regarded as a founder of the Madhyamaka.[100] The Madhyamaka, one of the philosophical traditions of the Mahāyāna, was not a school in the sense of the other early Buddhist schools such as the Mahāsāṃghika, Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda or Sammatīya, in one of which Nāgārjuna took ordination. Rather, the Madhamaka was considered a philosophical movement and never became a school which had the Saṅgha.[101] The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras,* the main literature of the Mahāyāna including the Madhyamaka, criticize the Abhidharma literatures' catalogued *dharmas* and reemphasize the doctrine of the non-substance of every phenomenon. The emergence of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and the Mahāyāna movement had a dominant influence on early Buddhism. Loy even compares the Mahāyāna movement with the Protestant Reformation in the West and places Nāgārjuna in the very center of the movement:

> The reaction of this philosophical development and other tendencies was the development of Mahāyāna, a revolution as important to Buddhism as the Protestant Reformation for Christianity, although curiously split in apparently incompatible directions: in popular religious terms, the paradigmatic but very human Buddha (when asked whether he was a man or a god, he answered: "I am a man who has awakened") was elevated into a metaphysical principle, in fact the ground of the universe, and granted a pantheon of bodhisattvas who help others attain salvation. Philosophically, however, there was a

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[100] Mādhyamika means "one who follows the middle way" and it derives from Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārika*. However, Nāgārjuna never referred to himself as Mādhyamika and instead called himself śūnyatāvādin, "those who propound emtpiness."

[101] Gethin, 238.

> thoroughgoing self-deconstruction of the Buddhist teachings that has continued to reverberate through all subsequent Buddhist thought, so radical and influential it has never been completely reappropriated. The locus classicus of this Mādhyamika school is in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās* of Nāgārjuna, who is believed to have lived in the second century A.D.[102]

Nāgārjuna's personal life and his exact historical record are not well known; his religious doctrine and philosophy must be traced through his works. According to Lindtner, many texts are considered to be the authentic writings of Nāgārjuna: *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Śūnyatāsaptati*, *Vigrahavyāvartinī*, *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, *Vyavahārasiddhi*, *Yuktiṣaṣṭika*, *Catuḥstava*, *Ratnāvalī*, *Pratītyasamutpādahṛdayakārikā*, *Sūtrasamuccaya*, *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*, *Suhṛllekha* and *Bodhisaṃbhāra*[*ka*].[103] Among these, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*MMK*) is an important source that reveals his thinking on "emptiness of dharma" which basically contrasts with "substance of dharma" of the Abhidharma schools.[104] In the *MMK* he declares emptiness (*śūnyatā*) the main idea of the book, and equates it with dependent arising and the middle way:

> All entities are natureless,
> Since transformation into something else is perceived.
> All entities lack naturelessness
> Because all entities have emptiness. (13:3)

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[102] Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 232.
[103] Lindtner, 11.
[104] Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1984), 92.

That which is dependent origination
Is explained to be emptiness.
That, being a dependent designation,
Is itself the middle way. (24:18)[105]

By asserting *śūnyatā* of the words of the Buddha as well as of all entities, Nāgārjuna criticizes "a lapse into identity-theory"[106] on the part of the Abhidharma traditions since they regard all dharmas as composed of substantially real dharmas. Huntington points out that Nāgārjuna and his Madhyamaka school pose a drastic challenge to discard "the obsession with a metaphysical absolute that dominated the religious and philosophical thought of post-Upaniṣādic India."[107]

Many scholars insist that the Sarvāstivāda school, one of the Abhidharma traditions, was the interlocutor of Nāgārjuna, and that he developed his Madhyamaka doctrine in reaction to Sarvāstivāda's substance-ontology. However, it remains questionable whether Nāgārjuna totally rejected the Abhidharma traditions. Joseph Walser notes that many scholars overlook Nāgārjuna's institutional relationship with other schools and that there is no probable reason why the Sarvāstivāda became targeted by Nāgārjuna.[108] According to Walser, the audience of Nāgārjuna's *MMK* was not only the Mahāyāna's followers or philosophical opponents but also, more importantly, monks and laypeople who possessed the authoritative power to make decisions in the major monasteries. Nāgārjuna's writing can be regarded as a strategy: "By refuting these opponents, Nāgārjuna secures an alliance with his spectator audience and

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[105] Tsong Khapa, 293, 503.
[106] Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend,* 91.
[107] Huntington, 29.
[108] Walser, 9.

thereby secures a place for Mahāyāna within their monastery. One of the primary goals of Nāgārjuna's strategy was the incorporation of Mahāyāna texts into the monastic industry of text reproduction and preservation."[109] As mentioned above, the emerging Mahāyāna was understood not as a new school but as a movement, and therefore had no monastery of it own. With the Mahāyāna marginalized from the main schools and struggling to survive in a "hostile monastic environment,"[110] Nāgārjuna's main concern was to secure its survival. In addition, since the relationship between the Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna was not fixed, but open to each other's thinking, Nāgārjuna attempted to maximize "Mahāyāna's authority while minimalizing its apparent difference from the norms of his host monastery" through syncretic strategies in his writing.[111] In order to create hybridities and maximize Mahāyāna's authority, Nāgārjuna inserted well-known Buddhist discourses into his writing with new interpretations and convinced the audiences that his writing or Mahāyāna sūtras were *buddhavacana*, "word of the Buddha."[112] For example, we find the homage verse of the *MMK,* "I prostrate to the perfect Buddha, The best of all teachers, who taught that that which is dependent origination is without cessation, without arising. . ."[113] Furthermore, Nāgārjuna showed "neither a blanket denial nor a blanket acceptance"[114] of the Abhidharma literature because he acknowledged that "Mahāyāna's survival depended more on making friends than on conquering

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[109] Ibid., 3.
[110] Ibid., 4.
[111] Ibid., 14.
[112] Ibid., 170.
[113] Tsong Khapa, 24.
[114] Walser, 225.

enemies."[115] Consequently he refuted only certain notions of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, such as dharma as *svabhāva*, not disproving all of its ideas. On the other hand, Walser maintains that Nāgārjuna contributed to emphasizing the doctrine of emptiness as "the lynchpin attaching the emptiness of *saṃsāra* seamlessly to the emptiness of *nirvāṇa*."[116]

To sum up, early Buddhist history shows that there are various and dynamic changes of view of ontological thought. The Abhidharma traditions claim that irreducible dharmas have their own substantial existence (*svabhāva*); on the contrary, Nāgārjuna argues that all phenomena are empty of substantial essence and even emptiness is emptiness. Derrida's theory of deconstruction may contribute to our understanding of early Buddhist traditions in India and the conflict between dismantling and reconstructing ontological metaphysics. According to Loy, Buddhist traditions are the history of "struggle between deconstructive delimitation and metaphysical reappropriation, between a message that undermines all security by undermining the sense-of-self that seeks security, and a countervailing tendency to dogmatize and institutionalize that challenge."[117]

b) Western Metaphysics and Derrida

Just as Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness is a reaction to the ontological perspectives of the ancient Indian traditions, the theory of deconstruction is Derrida's

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[115] Ibid., 226.
[116] Ibid., 164.
[117] Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 227.

response to the long lasting metaphysics of the West. Deconstruction is regarded as a type of literary criticism, a branch of philosophy, a negative theology, a new movement of architecture and a new ethical movement. Even though it is applied to many areas, it has no specific theory and no classified procedure. The only task of deconstruction is "to rethink the conceptual and non-conceptual foundation of the Western tradition from the ground up."[118] According to Derrida, the Western philosophical tradition is a history of metaphysics which is concerned with identity. The main aim of his theory of deconstruction is to reveal this ontological aspect and to undo metaphysical thought.

As a branch of philosophy, metaphysics investigates the fundamental nature of being and deals with reality. For example, what does reality consist of, and what nature does it have? The main task of metaphysics is "to lay out a complete, coherent ontology, embracing all that is necessary to capture the correct account of the world in any of the special inquiries – whether they be empirical, mathematical, modal, or moral."[119] Therefore, it has a strong ontological aspect, namely "the search for the ultimate principles of reality."[120] Historically, Western metaphysics began with Plato and Aristotle, whose concept of *ousia*, "substance" or "being," deeply influences Western philosophy.[121] Metaphysics becomes a kind of "parameter according to which the totality of being is quite literally set in order" and even hides in the appearance of reason and civilization throughout the whole history of Western

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[118] Martin McQuillan, "Introduction: Five Strategies for Deconstruction," in *Deconstruction: A Reader,* ed. Martin McQuillan (New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

[119] *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed, s.v. "metaphysics."

[120] Christopher P. Long, *Ethics of Ontology: Rethinking an Aristotelian Legacy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), xi.

[121] Ibid.

thinking.[122] Under the omnipresent shadow of *ousia*, Western philosophy is understood as a "metaphysics of presence," a term coined by Heidegger. According to Heidegger in *Being and Time*, the understanding of Being has been misunderstood since Plato, and therefore, Western philosophy must return to "the original experiences in which the first and subsequently guiding determinations of Being were gained."[123]

Then how does presence rely on systems of thought and how does presence convey the core of its existence? According to Derrida, Western metaphysics is logocentric and dualistic. Derrida points out in *Of Grammatology* that the tradition of Western thought is constructed by the binary system which divides every material entity and concept into opposite sides.[124] This binary opposition is represented by privileged terms, for example, good, culture, reason, virtues, man and so on. Especially, the ineradicable biases of reason and speech are based on logocentrism. Derrida defines logocentrism in Western metaphysics as follows:

> Nor merely to focus attention on what I shall call *logocentrism*: the metaphysics of phonetic writing (for example, of the alphabet) which was fundamentally – for enigmatic yet essential reasons that are inaccessible to a simple historical relativism – nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world, controlling in one and the same order:

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[122] Ibid.
[123] Cited in Claude J. Evans, *Strategies of Deconstruction: Derrida and the Myth of the Voice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xix.
[124] McQuillan, 8.

> 1. *the concept of writing* in a world where the phoneticization of writing must dissimulate its own history as it is produced;
> 2. *the history of* (the only) *metaphysics*, which has, in spite of all differences, not only from Plato to Hegel (even including Leibniz) but also, beyond these apparent limits, from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger, always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, of the truth of truth, has always been – except for a metaphysical diversion that we shall have to explain – the debasement of writing, and its repression outside "full" speech.[125]

Logocentrism refers to a logos-centered foundation system. Logos derives from *legein* which means "to gather, pick up, tell, or speak." As a philosophical term, logos has the meaning of reasonable speech or argument, and therefore, it connotes reason itself in Socratic dialogues.[126] Husserl claims in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* that logic is "the self-explication of pure reason itself or, ideally, the scene in which pure theoretical reason accomplishes a complete investigation of its own sense and perfectly objectivates itself in a system of principle."[127] In *Being and Time*, Heidegger asserts that logos as "reason, concept, ground" hides the privileged meaning of speech: "*logos* as speech really means *dēloun*, to make manifest 'what is being talked about' in speech. Aristotle explicates this function of speech more precisely as *apophainesthai*. *Logos* left something to be seen (*phainesthai*), namely what is being

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[125] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 3.
[126] Evans, xx-xxi.
[127] Cited in Evans, xxiii.

talked about."[128] In other words, the privileged and biased premise in logocentrism is identified: speech over writing.

Derrida criticizes this speech-centered attribute of logocentrism in Lévi-Strauss' writing. In *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss stresses the relation between innocence and writing in the case of the Nambikwara tribe. He insists that the Nambikwara tribe had been innocent until they were exposed to the writing of Western people. In this analysis, he associates "writing with exploitation and violence"[129] and holds that oral tradition is more essential and closer to nature itself than written tradition. However, Derrida points out in *Of Grammatology* that writing is not the reason that the Nambikwara tribe lost their innocence. It does not mean that he overemphasizes writing over speech. Rather, he tries to reveal the hierarchical element of human voice over writing and the binary system in metaphysics:

> The privilege of the phone does not depend upon a choice that could have been avoided. It responds to a moment of economy (let us say the "life" of "history" or of "being as self-relationship"). The system of "hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak" through the phonic substance – which *presents itself* as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier – has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world-origin, that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, the outside and the

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[128] Cited in Evans, xxi.

[129] Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 76.

> inside, ideality and nonideality, universal and nonuniversal, transcendental and empirical, etc.[130]

The prejudice in favour of speech over writing is called phonocentrism, an assumption that "ideas come into being first, and seek expression in speech, which is then transcribed into writing."[131] The relation of logos and speech is inseparable: "Within this logos, the original and essential link to the *phonè* has never been broken."[132] Consequently, the deconstructive device Derrida applies to Western metaphysics is the examination of language in phonocentrism. This is why Derrida investigates "a whole system of differences" in language:

> With the difference between real presence and presence in representation as *Vorstellung*, a whole system of differences involved in language is implied in the same deconstruction: the differences between the represented and the representative in general, the signified and signifier, simple presence and its reproduction, presentation as *Vorstellung* and re-presentation as *Vergegenwärtigung*, for what is represented in the representation is a presentation (*Präsentation*) as *Vorstellung*. We thus come – against Husserl's express intention – to make the *Vorstellung* itself, and as such, depend on the possibility of representation (*Vergegenwärtigung*). The presence-of-the-present is derived from repetition and not the reverse. While this is against Husserl's express intention, it does take into account what is implied by

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[130] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 7-8.
[131] Belsey, 78.
[132] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 11.

> his description of the movement of temporalization and of the relation with the other, as will perhaps become clear later on.[133]

Derrida's deconstruction of phonocentrism begins from the theoretical development of Saussure's structuralism. In *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure shows that the relation between the signifier and the signified challenges the "correspondence theory" in language. According to Saussure, the meaning of a word is due to the difference of each word. For example, the word "pen" has the meaning of "a long thin object to write with" because it is not a "fen" or a "pin." Thus, the meaning in each word is constructed by the relation of the signifier and the signified and this relation is an arbitrary one. In other words, each word has its meaning according to difference and exclusion from other words. That suggests that there is no perfect and ultimate correspondence between symbol and meaning in language. While Saussure's structuralism focuses on the relation between the signifier and the signified, namely the binary opposition, Derrida's theory tries to rethink this relation itself in language. He raises a question of the sign:

> More seriously still: by asking "*What is* the sign in general?" we raise the question of the sign to an ontological plane, we pretend to assign a fundamental or regional place to signification in an ontology. This would be a classical procedure. One would subject sign to truth, language to being, speech to thought, and writing to speech. To say that there could be a truth for the sign in general, does this not suppose that

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[133] Jacques Derrida, "Speech and phenomena: Introduction to the Problem of Signs in Husserl's Phenomenology," in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 52.

> the sign is not the possibility of truth, does not constitute it. But is satisfied to signify it – to reproduce, incarnate, secondarily inscribe, or refer to it?[134]

To explain this, Derrida makes a new term, *différance*, which is derived from the French verb *différer* and means both "to differ" and "to defer." *Différance* contributes two features: one is the separation of the signifier and the signified; the other is that the meaning of a sign is always absent because "each sign in the chain of meaning is somehow scored over or traced through with all the others, to form a complex tissue which is never exhaustible; and to this extent no sign is ever 'pure' or 'fully meaningful.'"[135]

In addition to the denial of a pure and transcendental sign, *différance* is used to dismantle ontological and theological metaphysics. The association between metaphysics and theology is inevitable in Western philosophy. Since the biblical phrase "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), logocentrism always contained an onto-theological aspect. According to McQuillan, logocentrism is "a form of ontology (the science of being) and Western thought is a system of onto-theology (thinking the question of who we are in terms of an essential and fixed authoritative centre)."[136] Logocentrism has a premise of the transcendental signifier, for example, truth, reason, beauty, justice, God and so on. Therefore, the search for the transcendental signifier is considered to be a

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[134] Ibid., 24.
[135] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 128.
[136] McQuillan, 14.

theological activity.[137] Kant introduces the term "onto-theology" and asserts that God is understood in terms of being and this understanding is a failure because there is no theological knowledge of God.[138] Heidegger also claims that metaphysics has consisted of onto-theology since Aristotle. Derrida agrees with Heidegger; on the other hand he states that the onto-theological element is still found in Heidegger's thinking because philosophy itself consists of onto-theology: "Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence. To the extent that such a logocentrism is not totally absent from Heidegger's thought, perhaps it still holds that thought within the epoch of onto-theology, within the philosophy of presence, that is to say within philosophy itself."[139] Just as religion and philosophy cannot be divided in Indian traditions of thought, theology and philosophy are inseparable in the Western tradition. Indeed, philosophy itself doesn't exist beyond metaphysics. Kant as well as other philosophers, for instance, Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Husserl, Nietzsche, Heidegger and so on, from ancient Greek philosophers to modern ones cannot escape metaphysics because metaphysics is no longer a branch of philosophy; rather, metaphysics is a way of thinking, a frame of making who we are.[140] Even though Derrida's deconstruction dismantles the onto-theological aspect, he still remains in the territory of metaphysics:

> To this extent, Derrida may plausibly be thought of as an *anti*-metaphysician, one who (along with Wittgenstein and Heidegger) seeks

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[137] Ibid.

[138] Kevin Hart, "Religion," in *Understanding Derrida*, eds. Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe (New York: Continum, 2004), 54.

[139] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 12.

[140] Christopher Norris, "Metaphysics," in *Understanding Derrida,* eds. Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe (New York: Continum, 2004), 16.

> to loosen the grip of certain misconceptions about language, truth, and reality that have so far held philosophers captive. However this fails to acknowledge the fact that he has continued to engage critically with the texts of that same 'logocentric' tradition and has done so, indeed, with a maximal regard for the coexistence within them of metaphysical motifs and complicating details of the kind briefly summarized above.[141]

In a word, Derrida's deconstruction goes beyond the phonocentric aspect, but still remains within the area of metaphysics of presence.

As indicated above, Derrida's deconstruction has been often considered as a negative theology since the 1980s and early 1990s. Compared to positive theology, negative theology denies the sufficiency of speech because God goes beyond language.[142] In "Epoché and Faith: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," Derrida explains the relation of God and the word "God":

> Given this deconstructive move, God could not be the omnipotent first cause, the prime mover, absolute being, or absolute presence. God is not some thing or some being to which I could refer by using the word "God." The word "God" has an essential link to the possibility of being denied. On the one hand, God is far beyond any given existence; he has transcended any given form of being. So I cannot use the word "God" for any finite being. On the other hand, God has an essential link to being named, being called. When I use the word "God," I mention it. It

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[141] Norris, "Metaphysics," 20.
[142] Hart, "Religion," 56.

> is a word that I received as a word with no visible experience or referent.[143]

The denial of the adequacy of language in regard to God indicates that negative theology exceeds the limitation of the logocentric aspect of metaphysics. In "Deconstruction in America," Derrida declares that the aim of negative theology is "to liberate theology from what has been grafted on to it, to free it from its metaphysico-philosophical super ego, so as to uncover an authenticity of 'gospel.'"[144]

Given the denial of the metaphysical thinking system, Derrida's deconstruction is often misunderstood as nihilism and relativism, or as a denial of ethical thinking. However, his deconstruction, from the beginning, has been "overtly concerned with topics we normally consider to be moral or ethical, fundamentally oriented in an ethical way, and increasingly centered on ethical themes."[145] In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida's concern with the absence of the other and the problem of difference applies to not only writing but also ethical thinking:

> The absence of *another* here-and-now, of another transcendental present, of *another* origin of the world appearing as such, presenting itself as irreducible absence within the presence of the trace, is not a metaphysical formula substituted for a scientific concept of writing. This formula, beside the fact that it is the questioning of metaphysics itself, describes the structure implied by the "arbitrariness of the sign,"

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[143] Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart, eds. *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 37.

[144] Cited in Hart, "Religion," 56.

[145] Jonathan Roffe, "Ethics," in *Understanding Derrida,* eds. Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe (New York: Continum, 2004), 37.

> from the moment that one thinks of its possibility *short of* the derived opposition between nature and convention, symbol and sign, etc. These oppositions have meaning only after the possibility of the trace. The "unmotivatedness" of the sign requires a synthesis in which the completely other is announced as such – without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity – within what is not it. *Is announced as such*: there we have all *history*, from what metaphysics has defined as "non-living" up to "consciousness," passing through all levels of animal organization. The trace, where the relationship with the other is marked, articulates its possibility in the entire field of the entity [*étant*], which metaphysics has defined as the being-present starting from the occulted movement of the trace.[146]

For Derrida, ethics in the history of metaphysics, such as Plato's emphasis on the good life or John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, focuses on generalizing a common rule to attain universality, and this generalization is acquired by means of exclusion of the other.[147] Therefore, since metaphysical thinking becomes a hindrance to ethics because of its exclusion and the binary system, Derrida asserts: "Finally, the category of the *ethical* is not only dissociated from metaphysics but coordinated with something other than itself, a previous and more radical function. When ethics is not treated this way, when law, the power of resolution, and the relationship to the other are once more part of the *archia*, they lose their ethical specificity."[148]

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[146] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 47.
[147] Roffe, 38.
[148] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 81.

Derrida's thinking on ethics is influenced by the philosophy of Levinas, which emphasizes relationship with others and attacks ontology in light of the fact that the primary concern of being brings about such exclusion of the other. For Levinas, ethics should be understood in terms of responsibility, debt and respect rather than ontological concerns, such as human rights or freedom. While Levinas regards the relationship between the self and the other as a hierarchical relationship, Derrida claims that there is not this hierarchy but "a radical and universal disequilibrium, where all sameness is dissolved into a web of otherness."[149] Therefore, one of his most controversial claims, "There is nothing outside of the text"[150] denotes not only the denial of a transcendental signified but also a new ethical movement toward human relationship and responsibility.

His concern for ethics continued in his later texts. From the early 1990s Derrida's concern about religion turned "to rethink faith and the holy, evil and the messianic, prayer and sacrifice."[151] In *The Gift of Death,* where Derrida declares "the possibility of religion without religion,"[152] he gives us a question of what responsibility and sacrifice are. He recalls the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Abraham's absolute duty and absolute responsibility is achieved in two ways: on the one hand, he keeps silent in order not to lose his singularity and on the other hand, he completes his responsibility to God by denying the responsibility for "the wholly other." Absolute sacrifice is "not the sacrifice of irresponsibility on the altar of responsibility, but the sacrifice of the most

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[149] Roffe, 41.
[150] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.
[151] Hart, "Religion," 57.
[152] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 49.

imperative duty (that which binds me to the other as a singularity in general) in favor of another absolutely imperative duty binding me to the wholly other."[153] Therefore, sacrifice, responsibility and duty in religion rely on the presence of one and the absence of the other. In short, while ethics within metaphysical thinking is achieved through exclusion and opposition, the new ethical movement of Derrida's deconstruction stresses the relationship with others in the terms of responsibility and debt.

[153] Ibid., 71.

Chapter 3: Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Nāgārjuna and Derrida share a main task in their philosophies, that is, the dismantling of the ontological and metaphysical views of each tradition. This is why Nāgārjuna is regarded as the most extreme and contemporary among Buddhist philosophers.[154] The main deconstructive devices for Nāgārjuna and Derrida are *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *différance*. The parallel of *śūnyatā* with *différance* leads to other similarities: the keys of each deconstruction, namely dependent arising and trace; the method of embracing the world, that is, the two truths and two levels of deconstruction; the way to understand and reconcile two extremes, that is, the middle way and the middle voice respectively.

When comparing two different systems of thought, we might try to find weaknesses in one or the other's philosophical thinking, or focus on "a competition between deconstruction and Buddhism."[155] However, especially in the case of the comparison of Nāgārjuna and Derrida, we should avoid projecting religious beliefs or judging that Nāgārjuna's strategy of deconstruction is better than Derrida's.[156] Jin Y. Park warns, "While others have attempted to interpret the linguistic nature of *différance* as a limitation of Derridean deconstruction, I have reservations about such an interpretation, which create a competition between deconstruction and Buddhism.

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[154] Mervyn Sprung, "Being and the Middle Way," in *The Question of Being: East-West Perspectives*," ed. Mervyn Sprung (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1978), 129.

[155] Jin Y. Park, "Naming the Unnameable: Dependent Co-arising and *Différance*," in *Buddhisms and Deconstructions*, ed. Jin Y. Park (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 13.

[156] For example, Loy asserts that while Nāgārjuna escapes logocentrism, Derrida still remains within it ("The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 239). Magliola also mentions that while "the Derridean performs the logocentric and differential self-consciously and piecemeal," the Nagarjunist moves freely "between the objectivism of ego and pure devoidness" because he has *tathatā* (*Derrida on the Mend*, 126).

That approach plays the latter over against the former by crediting Buddhism's function as a religious discourse and further positing religious practice as the final goal to be achieved in deconstruction."[157] Therefore, the comparison in this chapter aims to understand Nāgārjuna's *MMK*, in which Nāgārjuna demonstrates the deconstruction of ontology, through comparison with Derridean deconstruction.

a) *Śūnyatā*

Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* and Derrida's *différance* are very similar in that they both deny fixed and transcendental signifiers for all phenomena, and that they do not posit any essence or identity, for example, the emptiness of emptiness. Robert Magliola, a scholar who initiates a comparison between Nāgārjuna and Derrida, asserts, "Nagarjuna's sunyata ('devoidness') is Derrida's *différance*, and is the absolute negation which absolutely deconstitutes but which constitutes directional trace."[158] Loy also points out the parallel between them: "Here the obvious parallel with Derrida's *différance* runs deep. *Śūnyatā*, like *différance*, is permanently 'under erasure,' deployed for tactical reasons but denied any semantic or conceptual stability."[159] Like Derrida's deconstruction of Western metaphysics, *śūnyatā* is "the deconstruction of any sort of cognitive system, both in logic and in everyday life."[160]

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[157] Jin Y. Park, "Naming the Unnameable: Dependent Co-arising and *Différance*,"13.
[158] Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*, 89.
[159] David Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 234.
[160] Kenneth Liberman, "The Grammatology of Emptiness: Postmodernism, the Madhyamaka Dialectic, and the Limits of the Text," *International Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 124 (1991): 437.

Nāgārjuna is well known as a founder of the Madhyamaka (the Middle). However, he never referred to himself as a Mādhyamika, a follower of the Madhyamaka, and instead named himself the *śūnyatāvādin*, one who holds to the position of *śūnyatā.*[161] This implies that *śūnyatā* is the most important for Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka: "The concept of emptiness is of the highest value and most profound truth precisely because of its soteriological application as the tranquilizing agent for 'conceptual diffusion.'"[162] In fact, Nāgārjuna did not create a new doctrine of *śūnyatā,* but developed it from the words of the Buddha (*Buddhavacana*). *Śūnyatā* soon becomes the main theme of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. Geshe Ngawang Samten and Jay L. Garfield summarize the central elements of Nāgārjuna's *MMK*: "The emptiness of all phenomena, the emptiness of that emptiness, and the identities of emptiness with dependent arising and of the conventional and ultimate truth are the central ontological principles of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā.*"[163] Then, what is *śūnyatā*? The term *śūnyatā* derives from the Sanskrit *śū*, "to swell." According to Loy, since *śū* means not only "hollow or empty" like a hollow balloon but "to be swollen" like a pregnant woman, the English word "emptiness" should be understood as "pregnant with possibilities."[164]

Jan Westerhoff suggests that Candrakīrti, a 7th century commentator, classified *svabhāva* into three different senses in the ontological dimension: essence-*svabhāva*,

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[161] Williams, 140.
[162] Huntington, 55.
[163] Samten and Garfield, Translators' Introduction to *Ocean of Reasoning*, xx.
[164] David Loy, "The Clôture of Deconstruction: A Mahāyāna Critique of Derrida," *International Philosophy Quarterly* 27 (1987): 63.

substance-*svabhāva*, and absolute-*svabhāva*.[165] First of all, essence-*svabhāva* indicates the specific quality of one object which is distinguished from another one. Candrakīrti points out that while essence-*svabhāva* equates with the essential feature of an object, the object can lose its essence when the object ceases.[166] For example, heat is the essence-*svabhāva* of fire since it is the most distinctive feature of fire, but when fire is extinguished, it also loses this quality.

Secondly, there is a substance-*svabhāva*, which is the most problematic notion among the three senses of *svabhāva*, since it is an ontological basis for Abhidharma traditions, such as the Sarvāstivāda.[167] For the Sarvāstivādins, the irreducible elements are substance-*svabhāva*, which is permanent and independent in the ontological concept. For instance, they consider "partless moments of consciousness" as intrinsic and ultimate essence since "partless moments of consciousness" are neither constructed by language nor dependent on other objects. Therefore, it is substance-*svabhāva* that is Nāgārjuna's first concern to refute and deconstruct in the *MMK*. The third notion of *svabhāva* is absolute-*svabhāva*, which is described as follows by Candrakīrti: "Ultimate reality for the Buddhas is *svabhāva* itself. That, moreover, because it is itself nondeceptive is the truth of ultimate reality. It must be known by each one for himself."[168] Even though absolute- *svabhāva* is referred to as a kind of *svabhāva*, it does not indicate the substantial essence but it is identified with *śūnyatā*, that is, lack of *svabhāva*. Westerhoff understands that *śūnyatā* can be referred to as

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[165] Jan Westerhoff, "The Madhyamaka Concept of Svabhāva: Ontological and Cognitive Aspects," *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2007): 18.
[166] Ibid., 9.
[167] Ibid., 20.
[168] Ibid., 30.

svabhāva because "emptiness, i.e., the absence of substance-*śvabhāva* constitutes the essence-*svabhāva* of all things," and "emptiness is a property all objects could not lose without ceasing to be those very objects."[169] In short, the main target of Nāgārjuna's *MMK* is substance-*svabhāva*, which the Sarvāstivādins regard as the ultimate and real object ontologically, while essence-*svabhāva* is considered as the distinguishing quality of an object and absolute-*svabhāva* as another indication of *śūnyatā*.

Not only does the idea of *svabhāva*, that is, the intrinsic and permanent "essence" of self or entity, come from the misconception of the world as the way it is apparently seen, which is delusion (*moha*) or ignorance (*avidyā*), but it is also derived from craving (*taṇhā*) and attachment (*upādāna*).[170] The desire for a permanent self only leads to the suffering of oneself and others. Therefore, the aim of Buddhism is to get rid of the attachment of self and to "realize selflessness, both metaphysically and ethically,"[171] that is, to be a "selfless person," to use Steven Collins' term. According to Collins, in addition to the three signata of impermanence (*annica*), suffering (*duḥkha*) and not-self (*anatta*), a fourth mark in Mahāyāna thought is *śūnyatā*, which indicates two meanings: one the selflessness of persons, the other the selflessness of things.[172] He explains the selflessness of things in two aspects. First of all, a substantial self cannot be found anywhere as an "own-being" (*svabhāva*); secondly, dharma is not a constant object but an "instrumental means of categorising the

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[169] Ibid., 33-4.
[170] Gethin, 146.
[171] Ibid., 47.
[172] Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 124. According to Collins, while *śūnyatā* refers to the selflessness of persons and that of things in Mahāyāna thought, *śūnyatā* and not-self (*anatta*) represent the same thing in the Theravāda (Collins, 124-6).

contents of mental life in such a way as to reduce and eventually destroy 'selfish' desire and attachment."[173]

In the history of Buddhism, there are several views of what the person is composed of. Some people think the person consists of five aggregates (*skandhas*): form, feelings, recognition, volitional activities, and conscious awareness. Others believe that the substance of the person is twelve spheres: six senses (five physical senses plus mind) and six classes of object of those senses. In addition, there is a variant featuring eighteen elements: six senses, six classes of sense object and six kinds of consciousness. The problem of what the self is composed of derives from an ontological view of dharmas, namely that they have essence and substance. What is interesting is that the Buddha does not say anything about self or not-self in his first discourse in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (the 'Discourse on the Teaching of the Wheel of the Teaching').[174] Instead, the doctrine of not-self is found in the *Anattalakkahaṇa Sutta* (the 'Discourse on the Definition of Not-Self):

> Bhikkhus [monks], material form [physical form, *rūpa*] is not self [*rūpaṃ bhikkhave anattā*]. If material form were self, this material form would not lead to affliction, and it could be had of material form: 'Let my material form be thus; let my material form be not thus.' And it is because material form is not self that it therefore leads to affliction, and that it cannot be had of material form: 'Let my material form be thus; let my material form be not thus.' Feeling [sensation; *vedanā*] is not

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[173] Ibid., 124.

[174] Williams, 57. In the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* we see the Buddha's first sermon of the Four Noble Truths: *duḥkha* (suffering), *taṇhā* (craving: the origin of suffering), *nirvāṇa* (cessation) and *mārga* (way: the eightfold path).

> self . . . . [Determinate] perception [conception; saññā; Sanskrit:saṃjña] is not self . . . .Formation [volitions etc.,: *saṃskārā*; Sanskrit: *saṃskāraḥ*] are not self . . . .Consciousness (viñña; Sanskrit: *vijñāna*) is not self . . . .[175]

In this passage, the Buddha says that each of the five aggregates is not self but just a flux of physical (form) and mental phenomena (the other four: feeling, recognition, volitional activities, and conscious awareness). Consequently, Nāgārjuna's emphasis of *śūnyatā* is a kind of attack on the ontological view of those who hold that the temporal flux has a substantial and permanent existence.

In the fourth chapter of the *MMK*, Nāgārjuna analyzes the five aggregates from form to conscious awareness and concludes that each constituent of the person is dependent on the relation of the perceiver and the perceived and therefore empty:

> When an argument is advanced on the grounds of emptiness,
> If someone were to offer a reply,
> Any such reply will fail, since it will presuppose
> Exactly what is to be proven. (4:8)
> When an explanation is made through emptiness,
> Whoever would find fault with it
> Will find no fault, since any such criticism will presuppose
> Exactly what is to be proven. (4:9)[176]

According to Bugault, since the five aggregates are dependent upon each other as cause and effect, Nāgārjuna's analysis shapes "a postponed, delayed circularity"

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[175] Cited in Williams, 57.
[176] Tsong Khapa, 148.

which "remains uncompleted, being abruptly broken off after a fivefold series of fruitless attempts have taken place."[177] Nāgārjuna shows that there is neither a producer nor a product because "emptiness does not denote any being" and "this name is itself non-referential."[178] Nāgārjuna understands that the fixed notion of a self is derived from linguistic usage. The linguistic expression, "I exist," leads speakers to believe that there is an "I" as a doer and a subjectivity, because people tend to presuppose the substantial and constant thing when using language. However, the notion of "I" is not a constant and independent agent but "a product of linguistic usage,"[179] and the view of "I" as a substantial entity is an incorrect perspective. In addition, Loy admits, "No privileged language is created in this deconstruction, and his goal cannot be expressed or pointed to without the delusive logocentrisms of language; but like Derrida, Nāgārjuna thus uses it 'under erasure,' without committing himself to its categories."[180]

In regard to language, Derrida creates the concept of *différance* to analyze the relationship of signified and signifier:

> The verb "to differ" [*différer*] seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates differences as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalizing* that puts off until "later" what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible. Sometimes the

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[177] Guy Bugault "The Immunity of *Śūnyatā*: Is It Possible to Understand *Madhyamakakārikās*, 4:8-9?" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28 (2000): 385.
[178] Ibid., 394.
[179] Gethin, 139.
[180] Loy, "The Clôture of Deconstruction: A Mahāyāna Critique of Derrida," 64.

> *different* and sometimes the *deferred* correspond [in French] to the verb "to differ." This correlation, however, is not simply one between act and object, cause and effect, or primordial and derived.[181]

Différance means that the signifier always differs and defers in the context and it never arrives at the origin of the meaning or the ultimate truth. In other words, the meaning of language "eludes the grasp of a pure, self-present awareness"[182] and therefore "there is no privileged ground of reflection from which thought could ever organize or control the flux of temporal experience."[183] *Différance* shows there is only the play of the different and deferred in language. For example, the expression "I exist" will survive its author even after the death of the author, which Derrida explains as repetition of language, "arche-writing."[184] In addition, Derrida's *différance* is "neither a word nor a concept"[185] and moreover, does not have any identity:

> In the one case "to differ" signifies nonidentity; in the other case it signifies the order of the *same*. Yet there must be a common, although entirely differant [*différante*], root within the sphere that relates the two movements of differing to one another. We provisionally give the name *differance* to this *sameness* which is not *identical*: by the silent writing of *a*, it has the desired advantage of referring to differing, both as

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[181] Derrida, "Differance," in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 129.
[182] Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 46.
[183] Ibid., 47.
[184] Park, "Naming the Unnameable: Dependent Co-arising and *Différance*," 11.
[185] Derrida, "Differance," 136.

> spacing/temporalizing and as the movement that structures every dissociation.[186]

According to *différance*, any signifier cannot reach "any single, self-identical meaning,"[187] which indicates that *différance* itself does not contain any fixed identity. Moreover, the term *différance* is confused with the word "difference," when heard in French. Mabbett describes the nature of *différance*: "Deconstruction, however, has no existence as an activity separate from the phenomena whose nature it recognizes, which it deconstructs. It is a non-thing in itself."[188] Since *différance* signifies non-identity, it, like *śūnyatā*, has no essence.

What is most important to consider is that *śūnyatā* itself is empty, that is, it is the emptiness of emptiness. Even though *śūnyatā* is the most important doctrine in understanding Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, it has no essence:

> By a misperception of emptiness
> A person of little intelligence is destroyed:
> Like a snake incorrectly seized,
> Or like a spell incorrectly cast. (24:11)
> For him to whom emptiness makes sense,
> Everything makes sense.
> For him to whom emptiness does not make sense,
> Nothing makes sense. (*MMK* 24:14)[189]

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[186] Ibid., 129-130.
[187] Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, 32.
[188] Ian Mabbett, "Nāgārjuna and Deconstruction," in *Buddhisms and Deconstructions*, ed. Jin Y. Park (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 25.
[189] Tsong Khapa, 498, 501.

In the above stanzas, Nāgārjuna warns that if you fail to understand the *śūnyatā* of *śūnyatā*, the emptiness of emptiness, you also make a mistake in reifying *śūnyatā* itself as a fundamental truth. Those who do not understand the nature of emptiness as "the emptiness of emptiness," or "the emptiness of 'the emptiness of emptiness'" also do not understand the nature of things, whereas those who do understand the emptiness of emptiness can reach the understanding of everything. In addition, the emptiness of emptiness exhausts all views and theories:

> The victorious ones have said
> That emptiness is the elimination of all views.
> Anyone for whom emptiness is a view
> Is incorrigible. (*MMK* 13:8)[190]

In this passage, Nāgārjuna cites the Buddha's word that those who have a skewed view of *śūnyatā* are incurable. In regard to emptiness as the exhaustion of all views in *MMK* 13:8, Candrakīrti explains that emptiness is "the exhaustion (*niḥsaraṇam*), the ceasing to function of all ways of holding to fixed concepts stemming from theories or views (*dṛṣṭi*) of any kind whatsoever"[191] and adds the Buddha's word to Kāśyapa in the *Ratnakūta Sūtra*:

> One for whom, in turn, the absence of being itself becomes a dogmatic view I call incurable. It is, Kāśyapa, as if a sick man were given a medicine by a doctor, but that medicine, having removed his ills, was not itself expelled but remained in the stomach. What do you think,

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[190] Ibid., 298.

[191] Mervyn Sprung, trans. *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 150.

> Kāśyapa, will this man be freed of his sickness? No indeed, illustrious one, the sickness of this man in whose stomach the medicine, having removed all his ills remains and is not expelled, would be more violent. The illustrious one said: In this sense, Kāśyapa, the absence of being is the exhaustion of all dogmatic views. But the one for whom the absence of being itself becomes a fixed belief, I call incurable.[192]

In other words, it is dangerous to understand the concept of *śūnyatā* as a fixed belief, or a dogmatic view, which is incurable. Huntington points out that the concept of emptiness is valid as a medicine for attachment until language is abandoned as a vehicle of transcendental truth: "The concept of emptiness is a medicine prescribed for a specific ailment – the disease of clinging – but the prescription will have only a negative effect as long as the Mādhyamika's language is forced into the mold of some privileged view of a transcendent, ahistorical (epistemic) truth or (ontic) reality."[193]

That fact that both *śūnyatā* and *différance* lack substantial essence and deny "conceptual stability"[194] makes them appear nihilistic or negative. However, *śūnyatā* is not nihilism, materialism, or relativism. In the same way, *différance* is not destruction, nihilism, or relentless negativity. This is because they locate themselves nowhere:

> Since all existents are empty,
> What is finite or infinite?
> What is finite and infinite?

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[192] Ibid., 151.
[193] Huntington, 57.
[194] Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 234.

What is neither finite nor infinite? (25:22)

What is identical and what is different?

What is permanent and what is impermanent?

What is both permanent and impermanent?

What is neither? (25:23)

The pacification of all objectification

And the pacification of all fabrication is peace.

No Dharma was taught by the Buddha

At any time, in any place, to any person. (*MMK* 25:24)[195]

In *MMK* chapter 25, Nāgārjuna explains that since all existents are empty, there is no distinction between the finite and the infinite, permanence and impermanence. Furthermore, more radically, no dharma was taught by the Buddha. In the same way, Derrida points out that nothing can precede *différance* in time and space:

> Nothing – no present and in- *différance* being – thus precedes *différance* and spacing. There is no subject who is agent, author, and master of *différance*, who eventually and empirically would be overtaken by *différance*. Subjectivity – like objectivity – is an effect of *différance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*. This is why the *a* of *différance* also recalls that spacing is temporization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation – in a word, the relationship to the present, the

[195] Tsong Khapa, 531-532.

> reference to a present reality, to a *being* – are always *deferred*.[196]

Since they are located nowhere themselves, Loy concludes, "For both, *différance/śūnyatā* is a 'non-site' or 'non-philosophical site' from which to question philosophy itself."[197] However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Derrida's *différance* still remains within metaphysics, because its analytic method is confined within language. Magliola asserts, "Nagarjuna's understanding of *śūnyatā* is not logocentric"[198] since *śūnyatā* deconstructs not only everyday experience including cause and effect but also a pure transcendental signifier, demonstrating the emptiness of all phenomena and the emptiness of emptiness. Consequently, Nāgārjuna subverts the ontological views of existence and non-existence with the concept of *śūnyatā*. In other words, *śūnyatā* is the most crucial and radical doctrine and is not even a kind of concept or view in that *śūnyatā* is deconstructed by *śūnyatā* itself.

b) Dependent Arising

There is a story about Śāriputra, one of disciples of the Buddha in the *Majjihima Nikāya*. The monk Aśvajit recited a summary of the Buddhist doctrine *anitya* (impermanence) which refers to causal connectedness among phenomena including our existence, saying "Of those dharmas which arise from a cause, the Tathāgata has

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[196] Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 28-9.
[197] Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 234.
[198] Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*, 92.

stated the cause, and also the cessation; such is the teaching of the Great Ascetic."[199] After hearing this recitation, Śāriputra at once attained a deep insight, and later became an awakened person.[200] The story shows the importance of causal connectedness and its extended doctrine *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent arising), which lies at the core of Buddhist thought[201] and is regarded as an equation with *śūnyatā*. In the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Buddha spoke to Ānanda about *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent arising):

> This dependent origination is profound and appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this doctrine that this generation has become like a tangled ball of spring, covered as with a blight, tangled like coarse grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe, the ill destiny, ruin and the round of birth-and-death.[202]

Pratītya-samutpāda, literally meaning "arising on the ground of a preceding cause," has twelve links (*nidāna*):

> Conditioned by (1) ignorance are (2) formations, conditioned by formations is (3) consciousness, conditioned by consciousness is (4) mind-and-body, conditioned by mind-and-body are (5) the six senses, conditioned by the six senses is (6) sense-contact, conditioned by sense-contact is (7) feeling, conditioned by feeling is (8) craving, conditioned by craving is (9) grasping, conditioned by grasping is (10) becoming, conditioned by becoming is (11) birth, conditioned by birth is (12) old-

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[199] Cited in Gethin, 141.
[200] Gethin, 141.
[201] Ibid.
[202] *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of Dīgha Nikāya*, 223.

> age and death – grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair come into being. Thus is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.[203]

In Buddhism, causation does not mean one way causal order of time or space, but rather mutual interdependence, that is, "the two-way dependence of a series of causal links,"[204] which affects physical forms like the body, as well as personal experience. Although *pratītya-samutpāda* is a profound doctrine, there is little explanation of it in the earliest texts. In addition, there are different versions of it, for instance the ten links in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, and changes of the order. However, the twelve links of *pratītya-samutpāda* is the standard formula. We find a specific explanation of it in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* and Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*.[205]

Nāgārjuna regards *pratītya-samutpāda* as the central principle and identifies it with *śūnyatā*. The importance of *pratītya-samutpāda* lies in two aspects: it becomes a key to understanding *śūnyata* and it reveals Buddhist ontology. First of all, *pratītya-samutpāda*, the further exposition of cause and effect in the interrelated twelve links, shows that all phenomena are dependent on each other. This interdependence and interconnectedness is the basis of the doctrine of *śūnyatā*: there can be no fixed and substantial entity if everything is interdependent. Candrakīrti asserts in the *Madhyamakāvatāra* (*The Entry into the Middle Way*): "Entities are not produced intrinsically without a cause, and not from causes like 'God,' for example, [which are nothing more than reified concepts]. Nor are they produced from out of themselves,

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[203] Gethin, 141-2.
[204] John S. Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), 99.
[205] Gethin, 149-151.

nor from another, nor from both [self and other]. They are produced in mutual dependence."[206] Nāgārjuna also starts the *MMK* by explaining interdependence:

> Neither from itself nor from another
>
> Nor from both,
>
> Nor without a cause
>
> Does anything whatever, anywhere arise. (1:1)[207]

On the other hand, how can the universe as well as personal experience be explained in Buddhism without recourse to any substantial self? It is through *pratītya-samutpāda* that Buddhist ontology, including personal continuity, is described. Gethin suggests, "The basic experienced facts of personal continuity are to be explained not with reference to an enduring substantial self, but with reference to the particular way in which the phenomena that make up a being are causally connected."[208] In other words, *pratītya-samutpāda* is important because it designates "the rational coherent structure of the universe."[209] However it does not indicate either that there is some ontological substance in the universe or that *pratītya-samutpāda* is regarded as a doctrine of fundamentalism. On the contrary, *pratītya-samutpāda* shows that not only personal experience but also the whole universe of suffering (*saṃsāra*) is not created by a divine absolute being like God or Brahmā, but is a process of *pratītya-samutpāda*: "The Buddha intentionally or by implication replaced any talk of God with that of causal dependence. God has no place in a seamless

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[206] Cited in Huntington, 170-1.
[207] Tsong Khapa, 61.
[208] Gethin, 143.
[209] Williams, 63.

web of natural contingency, where each contingent thing could be explained as a causal result of another contingent thing *ad infinitum*."[210]

We might expect the kind of binary system of cause and effect in *pratītya-samutpāda*. The idea of causation has always been a problem in Western philosophy, for example, R. Taylor's explanation of causation in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967): "It is apparent that some of the main philosophical problems of causation do not yield to an easy solution. The idea of a necessary connection between cause and effect may be, as Hume thought, an esoteric and metaphysical one, but it is doubtful whether anyone can render an adequate analysis of the causal relation without it."[211] However, Huntington claims that in the Madhyamaka's view, this misunderstanding of cause and effect is due to "a blind groping for justification of the unacknowledged presupposition that truth 'connects parts of reality in pairs.'"[212] Furthermore, this misunderstanding is the very ignorance which is the first link of *pratītya-samutpāda*:

> And whether these pairs be cause and effect, knower and known, subject and object, or any other dichotomy, this presupposition preserves at its core a kernel of contamination – the spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) embodied in the mind's inherent tendency to reify all existence into "things" that can be grasped at and possessed by an "I" that is itself only another fragmented, intrinsically existent thing. . . .[213]

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[210] Ibid., 64.
[211] Cited in Huntington, 41.
[212] Huntington, 45.
[213] Ibid.

Ignorance is not the opposite of knowledge but "the grasping of the person and phenomena as truly existent by objectifying them."[214] In other words, in *pratītya-samutpāda*, the relation between cause and effect is neither objectified nor truly existent. Rather, cause and effect are "artificial constructs, devoid of intrinsic, self-contained being."[215] With regard to interdependence of cause and effect, Nāgārjuna writes:

> Agent depends upon action.
> Action depends on the agent as well.
> Apart from dependent arising
> One cannot see any cause for their existence. (8:12)
> One should understand appropriation in the same way,
> Following the elimination of agent and action.
> Through action and agent
> All remaining things should be understood. (*MMK* 8:13)[216]

In two stanzas, Nāgārjuna explains the relation between cause and effect as one model of understanding *śūnyatā* and *pratītya-samutpāda.* This indicates that the connectedness is merely constructed and the view of the substantial connection between cause and effect is illusory.[217]

In order to understand the dynamic relationship between cause and effect without recourse to the binary system in metaphysical thinking, Derrida's deconstructive term "trace" is very useful. Actually, the keys to understanding *śūnyatā* and *différance*

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[214] Tsong Khapa, 536.
[215] Huntington, 57.
[216] Tsong Khapa, 230-1.
[217] Garfield, 182.

become *pratītya-samutpāda* and the trace respectively. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida introduces an originary trace or arche-trace, which indicates the absent and deferred origin of the truth including writing:

> The concept of arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and that erasure. It is in fact contradictory and not acceptable within the logic of identity. The trace is not only the disappearance of origin – within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an originary nontrace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace.[218]

According to the concept of *différance*, the desired origin of the truth is never reached in reality since language, which not only delivers the thought but also composes it, is always differed and deferred. Therefore, meaning is "the effect of the trace of the other in the same,"[219] and it is always under erasure along with the trace of other signifiers. In other words, the concept of the trace, which derives from the concept of *différance*, undoes the metaphysical search for the origin of the truth. Moreover, it also dismantles the binary system between cause and effect, the signifier and the signified, or name and concept. Derrida suggests that the meaning of "to be present" is

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[218] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 61.
[219] Belsey, 83.

perceived only in the relation of the past and the future, and the trace is found by this relation to the absence:

> Difference is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be "present," appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace relates no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not; that is, not even to a past or future considered as a modified present.[220]

In short, the concept of the trace contributes to undoing the binary system by displaying that we can only find the trace of others. Moreover, according to the concepts of *différance* and the trace, we never reach the pure signified: "We will never have, and in fact have never had, to do with some 'transport' of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched."[221] In other words, the trace and *différance* dismantle the idea of pure thought because the transcendental signifiers only rely on the binary system in metaphysics.

Similarly, the doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda* also refutes the binary system including cause and effect in that *pratītya-samutpāda* is not a single serial movement but "the multilevel causation for each and every moment to each other and every

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[220] Derrida, "Differance," 142-3.
[221] Derrida, *Positions*, 20.

existence."[222] Derrida indicates the problem of the relationship between signified and signifier, which becomes an "endless recirculation of concepts."[223] Similarly, in the Madhyamaka, misconception of *pratītya-samutpāda* is the very nature of *duḥkha*. Liberman finds a similarity between Derrida and Madhyamaka in that they both find the trace, not the origin: "What distinguished Madhyamaka from ordinary philosophy is that Madhyamaka scholars do not strive to assert the existence of any origin other than the trace within the text. They are through and through cognizant of the iterability of the text."[224] Similarly, Jin Y. Park asserts that *pratītya-samutpāda* and *différance* are unnameable since they break the rule of identity and language: "As dependent co-arising reminds us of heterogeneity of being, *différance* attests to the non-innocence of language and naming."[225] Through the endless play of *différance* and the trace in the context, Derrida's deconstruction undoes the transcendental signifiers of Western metaphysics, for example, God, freedom, reason, truth, culture, democracy, and so forth. What then are signifiers in Nāgārjuna's deconstruction?

The concept of soteriological foundation in Buddhism is somehow different from the West. Some Buddhist doctrines, such as *nirvāṇa* or the Four Noble Truths, can be considered as soteriological foundations. However, it is a misunderstanding to identify them with transcendental elements. While Absolute Reality is often identified with Brahman in the brahmanical tradition, in early Buddhism *nirvāṇa* is an event-term like

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[222] Park, "Naming the Unnameable: Dependent Co-arising and *Différance*," 14.
[223] Loy, "Deconstruction of Buddhism," 249.
[224] Liberman, "The Grammatology of Emptiness: Postmodernism the Madhyamaka Dialectic, and the Limits of the Text," 440.
[225] Park, "Naming the Unnameable: Dependent Co-arising and *Différance*," 15.

"attaining" and "extinguishing" rather than noun-term, "Absolute," "Reality," or "God."[226] In chapter 25 of the *MMK*, Nāgārjuna explains the nature of *nirvāṇa*:

> Cyclic existence is not the slightest bit
> Different from nirvana
> Nirvana is not the slightest bit
> Different from cyclic existence. (25:19)
> Whatever is the limit of nirvana,
> That is not even the slightest difference between them,
> Or even the subtlest thing. (25:20)[227]

In the above passage, there is not even the slightest difference between cyclic existence and *nirvāṇa*, because *nirvāṇa* itself is totally empty of any essence. Furthermore, according to *pratītya-samutpāda,* there is no distinction between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa,* let alone the mutual connectedness of cause and effect. That is one of the most revolutionary deconstructions since it dismantles even everyday life.[228] Loy insists that Buddhist thinking regards not *nirvāṇa* but the thing as a transcendental signified:

> What is the paradigm "transcendental signified," according to Buddhism? Not *nirvāṇa*, as two centuries of Western interpretation have led us to believe, for, as we shall see, *nirvāṇa* is neither transcendental ("The ontic range of *nirvāṇa* is the ontic range of the

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[226] Williams, 49.
[227] Tsong Khapa, 529-530.
[228] With regard to re-thinking everyday experience, Heidegger, in *Being and Time* (1927), also examines the way Dasein exists in everyday life. He demonstrates that a being is defined by temporality, not by a priority of presence (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., s.v "Martin Heidegger").

> everyday world. There is not even the subtlest difference between the two." *MMK*, XXV, 20) nor signified ("No truth has been taught by a Buddha for anyone, anywhere." XXV, 24). On the contrary, the paradigm transcendental signified is *the thing* – here meaning not only physical objects but also the objectified subject.[229]

On the other hand, Liberman maintains that "suchness" or "thusness" (*tathatā*), the way things are, is identified with the signifier.[230] "Thusness" is explained as the totality of reality which founds "the oneness and unity of the absolute and relative spheres."[231] For followers of Yogācāra, one of the Mahāyāna schools which emphasizes mind or consciousness, "thusness" is important not because they admit some essence in mind or consciousness but because mind just operates to confuse people and cause misunderstanding of the non-duality of subject and object.[232]

Candrakīrti explains that *śūnyatā* is "thusness" (*tathatā*) in the *Prasannapadā*:

> Whatever is the quintessential nature (*dharmatā*) of the elements of existence, that and only that has a self nature (*svarūpa*). And what is quintessential nature of the elements? Their self-existent nature (*svabhāva*). And what is self-existent nature? Original, invariable nature (*prakṛti*). What is original, invariable nature? Devoidness of being (*śūnyatā*). And what is devoidness of being? Not being of the nature of substantial thing (*naisvabhāvya*). What is not being of the nature of

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[229] Loy, "The Clôture of Deconstruction: A Mahāyāna Critique of Derrida," 60-1.
[230] Kenneth Liberman, "The Grammatology of Emptiness: Postmodernism, the Madhyamaka Dialectic, and the Limits of the Text," 441.
[231] *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Tathatā."
[232] Gethin, 249.

> substantial thing? The way things really are (*tathatā*). What is the way things really are? Being as they are (*tathābhāva*): invariableness, steadfastness throughout all time.[233]

"Thusness" does not have any essence itself and therefore does not produce any information, because "it is hardly more than a floating signifier that holds in place the locus of the 'whatever' that lacks any 'whatever.'"[234] In fact, Candrakīrti reveals the relation between name and concept:

> How can the above objection affect us? Because here the meaning is that the very coming to rest, the non-functioning, of perceptions as signs of all named things, is itself *nirvāṇa*. And this coming to rest being, by its very nature, in repose, is the ultimate beatitude (*śiva*). When verbal assertions (*vācas*) cease, named things are in repose; and the ceasing to function of discursive thought is ultimate beatitude. Again, the coming to rest of named things by the non-functioning of the basic afflictions, so that personal existence ceases, is ultimate beatitude.[235]

According to Candrakīrti's commentary on Nāgārjuna's *MMK*, *nirvāṇa* indicates "the very coming to rest," that is, "the non-functioning of signs of all named things." Loy insists that it is the most needed deconstruction because non-distinction between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and furthermore the non-functioning of name and concept totally undo the commonsense or everyday life:

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[233] *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti*, 155-6.

[234] Liberman, "The Grammatology of Emptiness: Postmodernism the Madhyamaka Dialectic, and the Limits of the Text," 441.

[235] *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti*, 262.

> But notice what is signifier and what is signified, for Candrakīrti: The nonfunctioning of perceptions as signs for named things is nirvāṇa. The problem is not merely that language acts as a filter, obscuring the nature of things. Rather, names are used to objectify appearances into the "self-existing" things we perceive as books, tables, trees, you, and me. In other words, the "objective" world of material things, which interact causally "in" space and time, is metaphysical through and through. It is this metaphysics that most needs to be deconstructed, according to Buddhism, because this is the metaphysics, disguising itself as commonsense reality, that makes me suffer – especially insofar as I understand myself to be such a self-existing being "in" time that will nonetheless die.[236]

Nāgārjuna dedicates the *MMK* to the Buddha, but at the same time, he refutes any Buddha as a transcendental signified. First of all, in the *MMK* he shows his homage to the Buddha with regard to *pratītya-samutpāda*:

> I prostrate to the perfect Buddha,
> The best of all teachers, who taught that
> That which is dependent origination is
> Without cessation, without arising;
> Without annihilation, without permanence;
> Without coming; without going;
> Without distinction, without identity

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[236] Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 249.

And peaceful – free from fabrication. (Homage verses)[237]

However, he also refutes the substantial existence of a Buddha. The view that the Buddha is a constant existent being is a reification of eternalism, and the perspective that the Buddha is not existent is regarded as nihilism. Therefore, the Buddha as a substantial and transcendental entity is refuted in the same way as the emptiness of all phenomena:

> Those who develop fabrications with regard to the Buddha
> The unextinguished one who has gone beyond all fabrication
> And are impaired by those fabrications,
> Fail to see the Tathāgata. (22:15)
> Whatever is the essence of the Tathāgata,
> That is the essence of the transmigrator.
> The Tathāgata has no essence.
> The transmigrator has no essence. (*MMK* 22:16)[238]

Nāgārjuna's analysis of *pratītya-samutpāda* goes further. As mentioned earlier, *pratītya-samutpāda* makes the doctrine of *śūnyatā* valid in that all phenomenal entities are interconnected and dependent on each other. What is interesting is that *śūnyatā* deconstructs causality since everything is empty of its substance and essence: "The irony of Nāgārjuna's approach to *pratītya-samutpāda* is that its use of causation refutes causation: after the deconstruction of the self-existence or being of things (including us) into their conditions and interdependence, causality itself then disappears, because without anything to cause/be effected, the world will not be

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[237] Tsong Khapa, 24-5.
[238] Ibid., 450-1.

experienced in terms of cause and effect."[239] According to Loy, this is the very point where Nāgārjuna differs from Derrida. Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, goes another step toward deconstructing not only the relationship between name and concept, but also everyday life, through *śūnyatā*: "Nāgārjuna's use of interdependence to refute the self-existence of things is equivalent to what Derrida does for textual meaning, as we have seen. But Nāgārjuna's second and reverse move is one that Derrida doesn't make: the absence of any self-existing objects refutes causality/ *différance*."[240] In sum, *pratītya-samutpāda* is considered as "nondependent nonorigination," since trace/ *śūnyatā* is never caught.[241]

c) The Two Truths

As indicated in the previous chapters, *śūnyatā* is the hallmark of Nāgārjuna's *MMK* and has an interrelation with *pratītya-samutpāda*. On this point, the questions may be raised, "Does Buddhism deny the ordinary world?" and "How can the notion of 'I' be explained without having recourse to *śūnyatā*?" When the Buddha refers to himself, he uses the word "I" rather than "five aggregates" or "a flux of mental and physical elements."[242] It implies that the Buddha has another level of understanding of everyday life, according to the two truths. Thus, we will examine the two truths of Madhyamaka Buddhism: conventional truth (*saṃvṛiti-satya*) is the truth of understanding being, self, world and so forth at the conventional level which is based

[239] Loy, "Deconstruction of Buddhism," 247.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid., 248.
[242] Gethin, 146.

on *pratītya-samutpāda* of mental and physical phenomena; ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*) is *śūnyatā* and the *śūnyatā* of *śūnyatā*.[243] We will find a similarity between Nāgārjuna and Derrida with regard to the two levels of understanding. Nāgārjuna uses conventional truth in order to assert ultimate truth; on the other hand, Derrida uses metaphysical logocentrism in order to deconstruct it. Moreover, both conventional truth and metaphysical logocentrism depend on the usage of language.

The two truths are important for understanding the different levels of accepting everyday life. The word "*paramārtha*" in ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*) means transcendental, ultimate or absolute, while "*saṃvṛti*" in conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*) indicates conventional, empirical, worldly or expressional.[244] According to Tsong Khapa's commentary on *Prasannapadā* in which he comments upon conventional truth, there are three meanings of "convention." First of all, it means lack of understanding or ignorance which conceals the way things really are.[245] Secondly, "convention" can be regarded as meaning "mutually dependent" because all phenomena do not have their own substance and show their external existence based on differences from each other.[246] Thirdly, "convention" can be considered to indicate "signifier," concerning descriptive and nominal characteristics of language in the everyday world.[247] However, he warns that these meanings of "convention" do not apply to "ultimate truth," which is like, for instance, "the word 'grown-from-the-lake'

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[243] Gethin, 145-6.
[244] Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*, 119.
[245] Tsong Khapa, 479-480.
[246] Ibid., 480.
[247] Ibid.

which is literally applicable to a frog but is not used to refer to a frog."[248] While Tibetan *kun rdzob* (Sanskrit *saṃvṛti*) means convention and concealment, *don dam* (Sanskrit *paramārtha*), which refers to "ultimate" in ultimate truth, has the meaning of "supreme fact."[249]

Douglas Daye analyzes four kinds of discourse in the *MMK*:

> There are at least four orders of description and abstraction operative in the *Mūla-Mādhyamika Kārikās.* First, there is the ordinary language abstraction level of "things" in the world, e.g., trees, stones, and properties of relationships such as hate, anger, and love. Second, there are rival metaphysical and epistemological theories which utilize such generic terms as Abhidharmic *dharma*, prakṛti, etc., which the *Mūla-Mādhyamika Kārikās* holds are incorrect and inherently contradictory. The general word (in the text) for such generic terms is own-being (*svabhāva*). These rival metaphysical and epistemological theories are the objects of the polemics in the *Mūla-Mādhyamika Kārikās*. Third, there is the third-order capstone *reflexive* concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Everything is empty, including "emptiness" itself. Fourth, there are certain implicit prescriptive relationships which involve a fourth order abstraction level, the concept of language-constructs (prajñapti).[250]

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[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., 480n.
[250] Douglas D. Daye, "Major Schools of the Mahāyāna: Mādhyamika," in *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective,* ed. Charles S. Prebish (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 84.

According to Douglas Daye, the third-order discourse of *śūnyatā* deconstructs the first and the second discourses so that the utterance of the word cannot match up with its meaning in a fixed and permanent way. In a word, there is no more belief that transcendental signifiers, for example, *nirvāṇa,* exist and have their own irreducible essences. Substantial and permanent essence of the meaning within ordinary language and the experience of everyday life are denied by the doctrine of *śūnyatā*; on the other hand, everyday experiences and practices are not refuted by the fourth order *prajñapti*, namely the concept of language-constructs. Therefore, the understanding of *prajñapti* as the denotative and fictitious construction of a thing through language is very important since it delivers the meaning of a word in the conventional way.

Sprung points out that there are two meanings of *prajñapti*: generally it indicates all words which correspond to ontic meaning; on the other hand, it refers to a term which leads to the Buddhist truth.[251] With regard to the function of *prajñapti* with which "self-existent" in everyday life can be perceived without total discredit, *prajñapti* can be applied to understanding the middle way since the notion of "is" and "is not" will be abandoned when we see all phenomena neither as existent nor as nonexistent.[252] In addition, the notion of *prajñapti* can be used in regard to conventional truth: it can provide a way of understanding everyday experiences. In other words, the fictitious construction of language is regarded as a conventional function as well as a self-contradiction: "In the Nagarjunist method, the logocentric construct which is ultimately self-contradictory but functions as clue is called a

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[251] Sprung, 133.
[252] Ibid., 134-5.

prajñapti ("language-construct" – I prefer this translation because it implies, as it should, both 'words' and 'ideas')."[253] *Prajñapti* which leads to concealing and revealing *śūnyatā* is a clue to the way Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka notice language.[254] In addition to *prajñapti*, there is one more notion which helps us to understand the function of language as conceptual and false imagination, that is *vikalpa,* especially used in the Yogācāra school. According to Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Three Natures* (*Tri-Svabhāva-Nirdeśa*), *vikalpa* is defined as conceptual and false imagination of a mental form or construction, through which people believe the binary of subject and object as reality.[255] Therefore, Coward points out that conventional language remains in conventional truth: "Thus language, as imagined mental construction, is limited to conventional truth and cannot represent ultimate reality. The result is a two level theory in which language is limited to the lower level of imagined forms of mental construction (*vikalpa*) that cannot touch the higher level of the real."[256]

Likewise, Nāgārjuna shows that conventional truth, expressed in conventional language, is necessary to understand ultimate truth.[257] In the following stanzas, Nāgārjuna emphasizes the delusion of language as a fictitious mental construct:

> Through the elimination of karma and affliction there is nirvana.
>
> Karma and affliction come from conceptual thought.

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[253] Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend,* 105.

[254] Magliola, *On Deconstructing Life-Worlds: Buddhism, Christianity, Culture* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 77n. In addition, Magliola asserts that "analytic deconstruction can be at most a *Prajñapti* but –as such– *prajñapti* can be very useful indeed (77)."

[255] Coward, 136.

[256] Ibid.

[257] Strong, 144.

These come from mental fabrication.

Fabrication ceases through emptiness. (18:5)

What language expresses is repudiated because

The domain of thought is repudiated.

Unarisen and unceased:

Reality is just like nirvana. (*MMK* 18:7)[258]

In his commentary on the above passage, Candrakīrti explains that karma and affliction are derived from conceptual thought, and conceptual thought comes from the named thing which "consists of knowledge and objects of knowledge, words and their meanings, agents and action, means and act, pot and cloth, diadem and chariots, objects and feelings, female and male, gain and loss, happiness and misery, beauty and ugliness, blame and praise."[259] In addition, he adds that *śūnyatā* should be understood as "the repose (*nivṛtti*) of the entire manifold of named things."[260] Candrakīrti's translation of verse 18:7 may produce a clearer understanding: "When the object of thought is no more there is nothing for language to refer to. The true nature of things neither arises nor perishes, as *nirvāṇa* does not."[261] In short, Nāgārjuna and other Madhyamaka thinkers utilize the concept of *prajñapti,* language-construct.

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[258] Tsong Khapa, 377, 382.
[259] *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti,* 172.
[260] Ibid., 73.
[261] Ibid., 177.

We will notice one of the most important perspectives of Nāgārjuna in Chapter 24 of the *MMK*. In this chapter, he starts criticizing his opponents who claim that the Four Noble Truths (the truth of suffering, of the cause of suffering, of the path and of *nirvāṇa*) do not exist if everything is empty. His opponent continues:

> If there is no Dharma and sangha,
>
> How can there be a Buddha?
>
> If emptiness is construed in this way,
>
> The existence of the three jewels is undermined. (24:5)
>
> Hence you also undermine the existence of the fruits;
>
> As well as the profane:
>
> The Dharma itself;
>
> And all mundane conventions. (24:6)[262]

His interlocutors argue that Nāgārjuna's emptiness denies not only all worldly conventions but also the three jewels (the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha). However, Nāgārjuna's response is that those who think that *śūnyatā* means the denial of the mundane world cannot perceive *śūnyatā* correctly and it is as dangerous as a badly seized snake or wrongly used magic (*MMK* 24:11). Therefore, *śūnyatā* should be understood at the ultimate level of truth, and the conventional world is also accepted at the other level of conventional truth. According to Streng, conventional truth indicates a practical understanding: for example, tables or chairs as "things," in spite

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[262] Tsong Khapa, 475-6.

of their emptiness in ultimate truth.[263] In other words, conventional truth is valid only when it is applied to practical understanding of everyday life.[264]

Nāgārjuna emphasizes that they cannot understand the Buddha's teaching if they fail to distinguish between the two truths:

> Those who do not understand
>
> The distinction between these two truths
>
> Do not understand
>
> The Buddha's profound teaching. (*MMK* 24:9)[265]

Nāgārjuna explains that in order to understand everyday experience we have recourse to two truths, that is, conventional truth and ultimate truth:

> The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma
>
> Is based on two truths:
>
> A truth of worldly convention,
>
> And an ultimate truth. (*MMK* 24:8)[266]

In *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Nāgārjuna also asserts the importance of understanding the two truths having recourse to each other:

> Or this reason (*hetu*) is similar in nature to the thesis to be established (*sādhyasama*), for sound has no [real] existence (*na hi vidyate dhvaneḥā*). We do not speak, however without having recourse to the conventional truth (*saṃvyavahāra*).

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[263] Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), 94-5.
[264] Ibid., 95.
[265] Tsong Khapa, 497.
[266] Ibid., 479.

> The reason (*hetu*) 'It is like "Do not make a sound"' is of the same nature as the thesis to be established – Why? – Because all things, being devoid of an intrinsic nature, are alike (*naiḥsvābhāvyenāviśiṣṭatvāt*). That sound, being dependently originated, has no existence by its own nature (*na hi tasya dhvaneḥ pratītyasamutpannatvāt svabhāvasattā vidyate*). [And] since it has no existence by its own nature, your statement: 'For here a sound that is existent prevents the other sound that will be', is precluded (*vyāhanyate*). It is not, however, without having recourse to the conventional truth (*vyavahārasatya*), it is not by rejecting the conventional truth, that we say: All things are void. For it is not possible to teach the absolute truth (*dharma*) without having recourse to the conventional truth.[267]

Therefore, the two truths are not contradictory at all. Rather, language is used as a practice whose purpose is attaining "the truth of the highest meaning, the actualization of emptiness, the cessation of all fear and suffering."[268] With the two truths, not only can "meaning" and "reality" be described in everyday life but also "the definite semantic content" is deconstructed "within the sphere of the sociolinguistic context where they are used."[269]

At this point, we notice the difference as well as the similarity between Nāgārjuna and Derrida's two levels of understanding. Derrida uses metaphysical logocentrism to undo the binary system and to deconstruct metaphysical thought. In *Writing and*

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[267] Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, trans. *The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna (Vigrahavyāvartanī)* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 111.
[268] Huntington, 39.
[269] Ibid., 39.

Difference, he asserts the need to use language within the territory of metaphysics: "We are not denouncing, here, an incoherence of language or a contradiction in the system. We are wondering about the meaning of a necessity: the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it."[270] Even though Derrida perceives that language has no fixed meaning and intrinsic essence, he does not deny the function of signifier and signified in language itself:

> But, as I suggested a moment ago, as soon as one seeks to demonstrate in this way that there is no transcendental or privileged signified and that the domain or play of signification henceforth has no limit, one must reject even the concept and the word "sign" itself – which is precisely what cannot be done. For the signification "sign" has always been understood and determined, in its meaning, as sign-of, a signifier referring to a signified, a signifier different from its signified. If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word "signifier" itself which must be abandoned as a metaphysical concept. . . . But we cannot do without the concept of the sign, for we cannot give up this metaphysical complicity without also giving up the critique we are directing against this complicity, or without the risk of erasing difference in the self-identity of a signified reducing its signifier into itself or, amounting to the same thing, simply expelling its signifier outside itself.[271]

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[270] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 111.
[271] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 281.

Ironically, Derrida could not abandon metaphysical logocentrism because language is the only device with which to deliver thought. Therefore, Derrida's deconstruction through *différance* and the trace remains within the territory of language. In short, Derrida and Nāgārjuna use language to attain their purposes: for Derrida, to undo the binary system and the transcendental signifier; for Nāgārjuna, to reveal the fictitious construction of language at the conventional level and to use it in order to understand ultimate truth.

On the other hand, the perspectives of language of Nāgārjuna and Derrida are somewhat different. For Derrida, language subverts itself and at the same time it cannot escape the territory of metaphysical thought. Derrida attacks the notion that "writing is somehow *external* to language, a threat from outside which must always be countered by the stabilizing presence of speech."[272] In addition, not only does Derrida undo the privilege of speech over writing but he also shows that writing is within the same category of speech:

> Derrida's aim to is to show that, on the contrary, writing emerges both within the very *theme* of speech and within the *text* which strives to realize and authenticate that theme. Deconstruction is in this sense the active accomplice of a repressed but already articulate writing. In Derrida's much-quoted phrase, 'Il n'y a pas de hors-texte' ('There is nothing outside the text').[273]

In other words, the irresolution of language is Derrida's dilemma: "The metaphysical dilemma is between reinscribing the new on the old terrain or having one's new

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[272] Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, 40.
[273] Ibid., 41

terrain be reinscribed on the old, a negligible difference."[274] For Nāgārjuna language is itself empty at the conventional level of truth. On the contrary, Derrida understands that language is intrinsic to the dynamics of difference.

Nāgārjuna escapes this dilemma because he has recourse to the two truths. Nāgārjuna, like Derrida, perceives that language is a device that may inform, yet may confuse people. For example, when they say "I exist," they believe that the word "I" contains a real substantial entity. Without denying it, Nāgārjuna understands this function of language as a thought-construct at the level of conventional truth. In other words, he accepts "the conventions of the logocentric world view in order to embark upon the process that leads to its destruction and ceasing."[275] Moreover, at the other level of ultimate truth, namely *śūnyatā*, language is *śūnyatā*. Loy explains that Nāgārjuna's understanding of different levels of language is the double strategy, that is, the two truths. One strategy is to show the delusive function of language and to undo dualism in conventional truth. The other strategy is "a more disruptive one: a 'higher' or 'surpassing truth' that "points beyond language and therefore beyond truth, raising the question of 'the truth of truth' and the very possibility of truth in philosophy."[276]

In short, Nāgārjuna's understanding of the two truths allows him to move "to and fro between logocentric and differential"[277] because his understanding is not "language-bond knowing."[278] It does not mean that Nāgārjuna denies the knowledge

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[274] Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 240.
[275] Mabbett, "Nāgārjuna and Deconstruction," 33.
[276] Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 241.
[277] Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*, 126.
[278] Ibid., 88.

system. Instead his doctrine of *śūnyatā* indicates "entities as they really are without *svabhāva*, and that is knowable."[279] Nāgārjuna demonstrates the referential and "the nonreferential approach to language and conceptual thought"[280] and at the same time points out that the everyday world including myself conventionally exists. But it does not exist, it both exists and does not exist, and it neither exists nor does not exist with any intrinsic substantial qualities. Things are mere nominal designations transactionally posited through dependent arising.

d) The Middle Way

The title of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way) shows the importance of the middle way (*madhyamā pratipad*) for Nāgārjuna. Like other doctrines, the teaching of the middle way starts from the Buddha, but Nāgārjuna and his Madhyamaka followers emphasize its importance, since for them, *śūnyatā* is the middle between eternalism and annihilationism.[281] *Pratītya-samutpāda* is explained as the middle way since the denial of eternalism and annihilationism is based on dynamic and mutual connectedness, *pratītya-samutpāda*. Therefore, *śūnyatā*, *pratītya-samutpāda* and the middle way are related to each other and each of the doctrines refers to other ones.

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[279] David Burton, *Emptiness Appraised: A Critical Study of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 37.
[280] Huntington, 38.
[281] Williams, 141.

First of all, the middle way indicates the understanding of individual and social concerns,[282] being the middle of two extremes, carnal pleasure and strict asceticism. In his first teaching in the Deer Park, the Buddha explained the middle way:

> Mendicants, there are two extremes which should not be practiced by any person who has left society to find salvation. What are there extremes? On the one hand there is the realm of desire and the pursuit of pleasure which is in accord with desire – it is a base pursuit, boorish, profane, crude and without profit. On the other hand, there is the pursuit of self-mortification which is sheer misery, as well as crude and without profit. Mendicants, passing through these two extremes and avoiding them both is the Middle Way, object of the tathāgata's perfect awakening, opening the eyes and the mind, leading to peace, to omniscience, to compete awakening, and to *nirvāṇa*.[283]

In addition, the middle way is regarded as the mid point between two views of personal existence, eternalism and annihilationism, which is based on the mutual connectedness of *pratītya-samutpāda*. Nāgārjuna, in *MMK* 15:7, emphasizes the Buddha's middle way: "The Transcendental Lord, through understanding entity and nonentity, in the *Discourse to Kātyāyana* refuted both existence and nonexistence." [284] In the *Discourse to Kātyāyana*, the Buddha told Kātyāyana about the middle between "it is" and "it is not":

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[282] Huntington, 36.
[283] Cited in Huntington, 36-7.
[284] Tsong Khapa, 322-3.

> Kātyāyana, everyday experience relies on the duality of "it is" and "it is not." But for one who relies on the Dharma and on wisdom, and thereby directly perceives how the things of the world arise and pass away, for him, there is no "it is" and no "it is not." "Everything exists" is simply one extreme, Kātyāyana, and "nothing exists" is the other extreme. The Tathāgata relies on neither of these two extremes, Kātyāyana; he teaches the Dharma as a Middle Way.[285]

Nāgārjuna mentions the middle between existence and non-existence in the *MMK*:

> To say "it exists" is to reify.
> To say "it does not exist" is to adopt the view of nihilism.
> Therefore a wise person
> Does not subscribe to "it exists" or "it does not exist."(15:10)
> "Whatever exists essentially
> Cannot be nonexistent" is reification.
> "It existed before, but does not now"
> Entails the error of nihilism. (15:11)[286]

On the other hand, Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka consider the middle way as a "particular sort of deconstructive philosophy which endows the Mādhyamika with its paradoxical 'non-position.'"[287] They refute ontological views such as eternalism or *ātman*. While the middle way refutes the reified notion of self or being, it does not

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[285] Cited in Huntington, 37.
[286] Tsong Khapa, 324-5.
[287] Huntington, 36.

mean midway between being and non-being.[288] According to Sprung, we might misunderstand the middle way as a means to attaining some truth or goal, for instance, enlightenment, or as a practical understanding.[289] However, the middle way is not a means or knowledge, but the way things really are.[290] In other words, for Nāgārjuna and Madhyamaka, the middle way is fundamental because it is equated with *śūnyatā*, which is equivalent to *pratītya-samutpāda*:

> That which is dependent origination
> Is explained to be emptiness
> That, being a dependent designation,
> Is itself the middle way. (*MMK* 24:18)[291]

In the above stanza, Nāgārjuna explains the middle way as a mutual dependency. The most radical middle way is to refute that the Buddha existed, that he did not exist, that he both existed and did not exist, and that he neither existed nor did not exist.[292] Candrakīrti, in the *Prasannapadā*, comments on the equation of emptiness with dependent arising and the middle path:

> This very absence of self-existence is a guiding not a cognitive notion presupposing the everyday (*prajñapti-upādāya*). Absence of self-existence itself, as it presupposes the everyday, is a guiding, not a cognitive notion. It is the components – wheels and so on – which,

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[288] Sprung, 135.
[289] Ibid., 136.
[290] Ibid. On the other hand, Huntington thinks that the middle way is "directly equated with the eightfold noble path" (right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration) and "with the last of the four noble truths" (the cessation of suffering) (Huntington 37).
[291] Tsong Khapa, 503.
[292] Huntington, 38.

> being presupposed, are, for practical purposes, referred to as 'a chariot' (*rathaḥ prajñapyate*). That to which the guiding expression refers, as it presupposes its own component parts does not come to be self-existently. It is this not coming to be (*anutpatti*) self-existently (*svabhāvena*) which is absence of being. This absence, characterized as not coming to be self-existently, is known as the middle way. What does not come to be self-existently does not exist. But because what does not come to be self-existently cannot cease to be, it is not non-existent. Therefore, because it avoids the dual dogmas of existence and non-existence, the absence of being in things, understood to mean that all things without exception do not arise self-existently, is said to be the middle way or the middle path. It follows that the absence of being as a guiding, not a cognitive, notion which presupposes the everyday and which is the middle way, is the preferred interpretation of the dependent arising of all things.[293]

Candrakīrti emphasizes that this very absence of self-existence is not a cognitive notion, which means that the middle way is far from the binary system. In other words, the middle way escapes from dualistic discourse[294] as well as from "centering."[295] This explanation of the middle way seems similar to Derridean deconstruction.

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[293] *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti*, 238-9.
[294] Park, "Naming the Unnameable: Dependent Co-arising and *Différance*," 10.
[295] Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*, 104.

Jin Y. Park compares the middle way with Derrida's "middle voice" from the perspective of the mutual dependency and non-dualism in *différance*. Derrida's *différance* is between active and passive and is called "the middle voice":

> Here in the usage of our language we must consider that the ending *-ance* is undecided between active and passive. And we shall see why what is designated by "difference" is neither simply active nor simply passive, that it announces or rather recalls something like the middle voice, that it speaks of an operation which is not an operation, which cannot be thought of either as a passion or as an action of a subject upon an object, as starting from an agent or from a patient, or on the basis of, or in view of, any of these *terms*. But philosophy has perhaps commenced by distributing the middle voice, expressing a certain intransitiveness, in the active and the passive voice, and has itself been constituted in this repression.[296]

Park regards Derrida's middle voice as equivalent to Nāgārjuna's middle way,[297] arguing that, firstly, Derrida's middle voice does not indicate the midway between two extremes. Rather, it shows "the impossibility of drawing a clear-cut demarcation" between a metaphysical thought system based on the binary system and the usage of language within the inevitable logocentrism.[298] Secondly, Derrida's middle voice is between the philosophy of presence, one extreme, and the denial of presence, another

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[296] Derrida, "Differance," 137.
[297] Park, "Naming the Unnameable: Dependent Co-arising and *Différance*," 12.
[298] Ibid.

extreme.[299] Indeed, Derrida's deconstruction is not against metaphysical philosophy, but aims to reveal its fixed binary system, to show the mutual interdependence between signified and signifier, and to deconstruct the existence of a transcendental signifier. However, as mentioned in the previous chapters, Derrida's middle voice remains within metaphysical but challenged philosophy.

Magliola puts side by side Nāgārjuna's middle way and Derrida's "and/or." He recalls Theodor Stcherbatsky's explanation of the middle way not as a median point between being and non-being, but "a slipping between and away from the binary categories of existence and non-existence."[300] In addition, Nāgārjuna's middle way is "and/or" between the "and/or" of existence and non-existence, identity and non-identity, causality and non-causality.[301] The middle way is not a denial of "it exists" or "it does not exist." The middle way is beyond the trap of ontological thought which presupposes some eternal and irreducible element in the universe, since "it exists" is based on ontological presupposition and "it does not exist" is also a variant of this assumption. In other words, Nāgārjuna's middle way escapes from logocentrism because he and the Madhyamaka regard the relation of language and meaning as an incoherent and dynamic one, based on the notion of *prajñapti*. Moreover, Magliola concludes that comparable with Derrida, "Nagarjuna's middle path is Derrida's 'and/or' between 'and/or,' though Nagarjuna attains *supplémentation* that Derrida never quite does."[302]

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[299] Ibid., 13.
[300] Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*, 87.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid., 93.

With regard to the similarities between Nāgārjuna and Derrida, many scholars focus on their deconstructive doctrines. For instance, Robert Magliola, David Loy, Harold Coward, Ian Mabbett and Jin Y. Park emphasize the similarities or the differences between the two thinkers through paralleling Nāgārjuna and Derrida. On the other hand, Roger R. Jackson interprets the relation between Nāgārjuna's middle way and Derridean deconstruction from a different perspective. He suggests that the middle way is "a balance pole"[303] between two extremes: foundationalism and deconstruction. According to Jackson, there are three different foundationalisms. One is grounded on the transcendental absolute, for example, God or Truth, and on the understanding of the world as a binary system, such as object and subject. These transcendental absolutes and the binary system provide the strong foundation of a belief or social order, which is found in both Western metaphysics and the brahmanical tradition. On the other hand, there is "non-absolutist foundationalism," which is not grounded in any transcendental absolute but characterized by claiming the certainty of knowledge. Finally, the third foundationalism is neither grounded on the transcendental absolute nor asserts the certainty of understanding. Rather, this "weak" foundationalism confirms the certainty of knowledge through silence or understatement.[304] With regard to "weak" foundationalism, Derridean deconstruction is not against it. Indeed, the target of Derridean deconstruction is not knowledge or thought system itself, but the metaphysical concepts of transcendent signifiers, the binary system or logocentrism. Therefore, there is little contradiction between "weak" foundationalism and deconstruction.

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[303] Jackson, 90.
[304] Ibid., 92.

In early Buddhist thought, not only are there deconstructive elements that dismantle the view of the eternal and substantial existence, but also important doctrines, such as *nirvāṇa* or *pratītya-samutpāda*, which are based on some knowledge. Above all, having seen *pratītya-samutpāda* in the previous chapters, we find that the suffering of human beings starts from ignorance, which indicates an emphasis on certain understanding or knowledge. David Burton notes that there are three interpretations of Nāgārjuna's philosophy concerning knowledge: firstly, an attack on and refutation of all knowledge-claims; secondly, an attack on "all conceptual and expressible" knowledge-claims; thirdly, not an attack on all knowledge-claim but a refutation of "a particular (wrong) ontological assumption, viz. that entities have *svabhāva*."[305] Concerning *MMK* 1:1 ("Neither from itself nor from another nor from both, nor without a cause does anything anywhere, ever arise"),[306] Burton points out that for Nāgārjuna, knowledge means understanding of entities' lack of *svabhāva*:

> Nāgārjuna's statement is a negative dogmatic knowledge-claim. Nāgārjuna claims to *know* that entities (with *svabhāva*) do not originate in any of these four ways (and, therefore, entities (with *svabhāva*) do not exist), and his argumentations are intended to provide the justification which makes his statement a case of knowledge. Nāgārjuna is no sceptic. His arguments are not designed to show that knowledge is

[305] Burton, 2-3.
[306] Tsong Khapa, 47.

> impossible. On the contrary, they are designed to *produce* the knowledge that entities lack *svabhāva*.[307]

Therefore, with regard to certainty of knowledge, Jackson's "weak" foundationalism has the resonance of conventional truth, which shows how to embrace everyday life and knowledge and how to understand *nirvāṇa*: "The transcendent truth cannot be taught without having recourse to the conventional truth. [And] Nirvāṇa cannot be attained without realizing the transcendent truth."[308] Jackson comes to this conclusion about the project of Nāgārjuna:

> In that pursuit, which motivates and shapes Nāgārjuna's entire project, it is assumed that (a) there is an enlightenment to be achieved by sentient beings, (b) there is a way the world is – empty – that must be known if enlightenment is to be achieved, and (c) there is a way – intellectual and intuitive *prajñā* – that the way the world is can be known.[309]

Consequently, the middle way as a balance pole between "weak" foundationalism and deconstruction provides a way of perceiving itself more concretely. The middle way is neither knowledge nor a practice: "It renders the dichotomy of theory and practice inapposite. There is no inner or outer here. There are no subjects, no doers, set against a world of objects to be manipulated in doing."[310] If we consider the different levels of understanding knowledge and language based on the dynamic relationship between foundationalism and deconstruction, we can easily perceive

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[307] Burton, 40.
[308] Ibid., 112.
[309] Jackson, 98.
[310] Sprung, 136.

Nāgārjuna's equation of *śūnyatā* with *pratītya-samutpāda* and the middle way without denial of knowledge and language and without recourse to competitively comparative judgement between Nāgārjuna and Derrida.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In the *MMK* Nāgārjuna's main conceptual tool for exposing the ontological view of the self and dismantling it is *śūnyatā*, which he identifies with dependent arising and the middle way. In a similar way, Derrida reveals the groundless ground of Western metaphysics through his creative use of the concept of *différance*. I use the method of comparison between Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* and Derrida's *différance* to reach a deeper understanding of *śūnyatā* in the *MMK*. This does not mean that Nāgārjuna and Derrida share the same deconstructive doctrine or theory. Nor does it mean that Nāgārjuna's doctrine should be privileged over Derrida's deconstruction, as when, for instance, some scholars insist that Nāgārjuna escapes the double trap of metaphysics whereas Derrida does not. Instead, this study examines Nāgārjuna's complicated doctrine of *śūnyatā,* which became a corner stone of Mahāyāna Buddhism, through comparison with Derrida's deconstructionist theory. Comparison of Nāgārjuna and Derrida, or Buddhist philosophy and Western philosophy, has been a focus of recent comparative philosophical scholarship in the West. At the same time, this trend generates some concerns about understanding the East. One of the concerns is that if comparative study lacks historical context and results in a reductive analysis, then it will suffer from Romantic Orientalism in terms of Edward Said or second degree orientalism in terms of Bernard Faure. Therefore, comparative study should not only include historical review, but should also avoid exact paralleling. In this dissertation, I examine four doctrines found in Nāgārjuna's *MMK* in comparison to Derrida's philosophical thinking.

Firstly, Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* escapes from an ontological view of the self. In asserting that five aggregates as constituents of the person are dependent on the relation of the perceiver and the perceived, or dependent on each other as cause and effect, Nāgārjuna denies the concept of substance-*svabhāva* of the Abhidharma traditions, that is, the Sarvāstivāda and the Theravāda. Comparable with Derrida's *différance*, which shows the play of the different and deferred in the relationship between the signified and the signifier and never reaches the origin of meaning or the ultimate truth, Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* refutes fixed and transcendental signifiers. At the same time it escapes the trap of logocentrism, since the concept of "I" which brings about the reified and fixed concept of permanent substance is constructed by linguistic usage. Moreover, in the way that *différance* is neither a concept nor a theory because of its non-identity, *śūnyatā* is devoid of all views and all theories since Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* is the *śūnyatā* of *śūnyatā* (the emptiness of emptiness).

Secondly, dependent arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*) is essential for understanding *śūnyatā* and the Buddhist view of everyday experience. *Pratītya-samutpāda* does not mean a simple relation between cause and effect, but explains personal experience of everyday life without recourse to absolute Being. According to *pratītya-samutpāda*, everything is interdependent and interconnected in the context of the twelve links. Therefore, there is no need for the concept of transcendental or absolute Being as in the case of Western philosophy. Moreover, since this mutual interdependence forms a seamless construction, it undoes the binary system of cause and effect. Derrida's trace, derived from the concept of *différance*, shows the absent and deferred origin of the truth. Therefore, it never reaches the pure signified, and also undoes the binary system

upon which transcendental signifiers always rely. Above all, for Nāgārjuna and his commentator Candrakīrti the relation between cause and effect is an artificial construct, empty of any substance, illusory. *Pratītya-samutpāda* breaks the correspondence of identity and word, since Nāgārjuna's view of *pratītya-samutpāda* as another expression of *śūnyatā* reveals the non-functioning of name and concept. Therefore, like Derrida's concept of the trace, *pratītya-samutpāda* undoes the illusory correspondence of signs and named things, and reveals the emptiness of any substance in constructed language. Moreover, Nāgārjuna refutes not only everyday life but also the Buddha as a transcendental signified, since there is no difference between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.

Thirdly, Nāgārjuna emphasizes the importance of understanding the two truths: conventional truth and ultimate truth. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, conventional truth denotes *pratītya-samutpāda* and ultimate truth indicates *śūnyatā* and the *śūnyatā* of *śūnyatā*. Comparable with Derrida's deconstruction, the perspective is focused on language, since language is a key to understanding the two truths. The significance of the two truths is that they prevent misunderstanding in the form of nihilistic views about the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness; the two truths show the different levels of understanding everyday life in Buddhist thinking. As Derrida relies on the function of language of *différance* and the trace to dismantle logocentrism and the binary system in Western metaphysical thinking, Nāgārjuna and the Mādhyamika focus on the usage of language as *prajñapti*, that is, fictitious and illusory construction of a thing through language. The two truths, as a double strategy, lead us to reconcile the concept of *śūnyatā* with everyday life, including the illusory construct of language at the

conventional level of truth, while at the same time they emphasize that all phenomena are empty at the ultimate level of truth. On the other hand, Derrida also reveals the function of language in undoing logocentrism and the binary system. However, his deconstruction still remains within the realm of language, since language is the only device as well as the essence of his theory. Language is totally empty itself for Nāgārjuna. While he uses language to reconcile the concept of *śūnyatā* with everyday life as conventional truth, he completely denies the substance of language in ultimate truth; language is *śūnyatā*.

Fourthly, Nāgārjuna's middle way, which equates with *śūnyatā* and *pratītya-samutpāda*, can be compared with Derrida's middle voice in light of the fact that they both deny the demarcation between two opposite extremes. For Nāgārjuna, the middle way is related to other doctrines, *śūnyatā* and *pratītya-samutpāda*, and serves to refute the ontological view of permanent self and annihilationism, for instance the concepts of "it exists" or "it does not exist." Nāgārjuna's denial of the ontological concept of *ātman* through the middle way denotes his deconstructive philosophy, which holds to non-position or non-centering. In short, not only does his interpretation of the middle way escape from the binary system, but it is beyond a knowledge system. On the other hand, Derrida's middle voice is situated between the active and the passive voice and shows mutual interdependency between the signifier and the signified. Furthermore, his middle voice points out the illusory concept of the binary system which relies on the function of language as the signifier and the signified. Consequently, even though their methods are totally different, the middle way of Nāgārjuna and the middle voice of Derrida aim at dismantling ontological metaphysics including the binary system. In

addition, according to Roger Jackson, Nāgārjuna's middle way can be interpreted as "a balance pole" between two extremes: foundationalism and deconstruction. Since some Buddhist doctrines, for example *pratītya-samutpāda*, are based on wisdom, it is important to note that not all Buddhist thinking is totally deconstructive. Therefore, the middle way can be regarded not only as a reconciliation between accepting everyday life and denying the substance of all phenomena but also as the middle of all extremes.

These four critical points of Nāgārjuna's philosophy can be used to undo the ancient Indian ontology which is also found in early Abhidharma traditions, for example the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda. Derrida's deconstructive devices, such as *différance*, the trace or the middle voice, also aim to dismantle Western metaphysical thinking. This raises some questions: What does their dismantling of ontology and metaphysics contribute; what does it bring about? If Nāgārjuna and Derrida's undoing of traditional being-obsessed thinking is not confined within the boundary of theory, what are the ramifications of their philosophies?

First of all, concerning Derrida, we should consider the predecessors of his deconstructive thinking. Levinas is one of Derrida's influential forerunners, alongside Heidegger and Husserl. Derrida owes a great part of his distinctive ethics to Levinas, who claims that Western metaphysics has a presupposed ontology and that moreover, the ontological concepts of Absolute Being or personal being reduce the Other to sameness in the name of freedom, equality, democracy and so on. For Levinas, Western metaphysics is opposed to ethics by means of the totality which does not consider the face of the Other. Therefore, Levinas' ethics is totally innovative and

even deconstructive: he denies positing ethics as one part of philosophy, but rather, contrasts ethics against philosophy. Ethics therefore becomes the center for the deconstruction of ontological Western philosophy since Levinas. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas points out that Western philosophy sacrifices Otherness for its ultimate freedom, which is achieved through reducing the Other to the same. This is also found in Heideggerian ontology:

> In subordinating every relation with the existent to the relation with Being the Heideggerian ontology affirms the primacy of freedom over ethics. To be sure, the freedom involved in the essence of truth is not for Heidegger a principle of free will. Freedom comes from an obedience to Being: it is not man who possesses freedom; it is freedom that possesses man. But the dialectic which thus reconciles freedom and obedience in the concept of truth presupposes the primacy of the same, which marks the direction of and defines the whole of Western philosophy.[311]

Relationship among other people is central in Levinas' ethics. He defines ethics as "this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other": "A calling into question of the same – which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same – is brought by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity as ethics."[312] Western philosophy is against ethics because

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[311] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 45.
[312] Ibid., 43.

it presupposes the awareness of self, the extension of self with the Other and the sameness of the Other with self. Levinas regards ontology in Western philosophy as "a philosophy of power" and "a philosophy of injustice."[313] In other words, Levinas defines Western philosophy as an ontology, "a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being."[314] For this reason, Derrida calls Levinas' ethics "an Ethics of Ethics."[315] His novel concept of ethics is not designed to go beyond ontology but to deconstruct Western philosophy's boundary and extend its horizon.[316]

Levinas' non-ontological ethics is influenced by Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*. In the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas mentions his debt to Rosenzweig: "We were impressed by the opposition to the idea of totality in Franz Rosenzweig's *Stern der Erlösung*, a work too often present in this book to be cited."[317] In *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig maintains that Western philosophy presupposes the unity of thinking with being and that philosophy consequently denies its duty or responsibility to listen to "the cry of frightened humanity."[318] He suggests a new term, "metaethical," which implies a new concept of humanity and world based on ethical thinking and ethical order:

> For metaethical was not in any case intended to mean a-ethical. It was not meant to express the absence of ethos, but only its unusual status,

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[313] Ibid., 46.
[314] Ibid., 43.
[315] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 111.
[316] Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 8.
[317] Levinas, 28.
[318] Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 11.

> hence that passive position instead of the imperative position that is usually assigned to it. The law was given to man, and not man to the law. This sentence, demanded by the new concept of man, runs counters to the concept of law as it appeared in the world as ethical thinking and ethical order; consequently this concept of man must be called metaethical. It is the very same relationship that presides in the new concept of the world.[319]

Concerning non-ontological ethics and relationship among humans in Western philosophy, Derrida also focuses on this chronic problem in metaphysics. While most critics concentrate on Derrida's deconstruction as philosophical or literary theory, some notice Derrida's consistent concern for ethics. For instance, Jonathan Roffe argues that Derrida's philosophical task in his whole works aims at reconsidering ethics, and that his philosophy is therefore ethical.[320] More intensively and precisely, Simon Critchley gives attention to Derrida's ethics and maintains that ethics is the goal of Derridean deconstruction: "an ethical moment is essential to deconstructive reading and that ethics is the goal, or horizon, towards which Derrida's work tends."[321] While Levinas explains his ethics through the ethical Saying and the ontological Said, Derrida expounds his philosophy by means of *différance*. Therefore, when we think the influence of Levinas on Derrida, it is easy to follow the constant trace of ethical concern from Derrida's early works to later ones.

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[319] Ibid., 20.
[320] Roffe, 39.
[321] Critchley, 2.

In a very early text, *Of Grammatology*, he shows his concern for ethics: "The general structure of the unmotivated trace connects within the same possibility, and they cannot be separated except by abstraction, the structure of the relationship with the other, the movement in temporalisation, and language as writing."[322] In another early essay, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," Derrida even declares a new era of "nonphilosophy," namely non-ontological ethics: "philosophy died *one day*, *within history*, or that is has always fed on its own agony, on the violent way it opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and its concern, its death and wellspring."[323] Dismantling ontological Western metaphysics, Derrida emphasizes the ethical relationship to other people, which can be achieved by dissociating from logocentrism and the binary system:

> Finally the category of the ethical is not only dissociated from metaphysics but coordinated with something other than itself, a previous and more radical function. When ethics is not treated this way, when law, the power of resolution, and the relationship to the other are once more part of *archia*, they lose their ethical specificity."[324]

This ethical relationship with others cannot exist without concern for responsibility and duty. His deconstructive device of *différance* always needs the other language or the other meaning in the context; in the same way, ethics as a new philosophical concern requires responsibility for the other. Consequently, the famous phrase, "There

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[322] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 47.
[323] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 79.
[324] Ibid., 81.

is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*)"[325] indicates that there is nothing outside relationship or interactive human responsibility. This is the kernel of Derrida's deconstructive ethics.

More interesting than simply comparing the deconstructive methods of Nāgārjuna and Derrida is the comparison of their oriented goals. If, as Critchely mentions, the aim of Derrida's deconstruction is to extend Western metaphysics to ethics and to rethink human relationship and responsibility, then what does Nāgārjuna's philosophy tend towards? Concerning Nāgārjuna's philosophy, we should remember that he is the first and most significant figure in Mahāyāna Buddhism. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the quintessence of Nāgārjuna's philosophy is *śūnyatā* and the *śūnyatā* of *śūnyatā*: the emptiness of any substance or intrinsic nature in all phenomena. In the *MMK*, Nāgārjuna demonstrates the nature of *śūnyatā* by equating it with dependent arising and the middle way. Moreover, his emphasis on the two truths insists on understanding everyday life by exposing the illusion of language. We must consider that these deconstructive doctrines which dismantle ancient Indian ontology lead to the higher goal of Mahāyāna Buddhism, that is, achievement of perfect Buddhahood. Then considering Derrida's ethics of human responsibility, what is the central thinking about an ethical movement in Nāgārjuna and Mahāyāna Buddhism?

It is the concept of perfect Buddhahood and the bodhisattva that is one of the greatest features of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Mahāyāna (The Great Vehicle) is often called the "vehicle of the bodhisattvas" (*bodhisattvayāna*).[326] In the Mahāyāna, the bodhisattva, "an awakening-being," or "one who is determined to achieve

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[325] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.
[326] Huntington, 19.

awakening," aspires to be a buddha not for his own salvation, but out of overrwhelming compassion for and responsibility to other sentient beings at lower levels. Nāgārjuna's re-emphasis on the importance of *śūnyatā* and his radical departure from the ontological view of *svabhāva* in Abhidharma traditions become a foundation of the concept of the bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna, since compassion and responsibility to the other is derived from awareness of *śūnyatā*. Lindtner claims that while the view of the world in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* is *śūnyatā*, the view of the ideal individual is a bodhisattva who realizes *śūnyatā* and compassion:

> If one were to condense the tenets of the Prajñāpāramitā literature into a few sentences it would perhaps amount to this: Their *view of the world* is that fundamentally all phenomena (*dharma*) are void of substance, i.e. illusory or empty. Their *view of the individual* is that as a bodhisattva gradually recognizing this fact one should, accordingly, live in the equanimity of universal emptiness, and, at the same time, through compassion, devote oneself to the task of liberating all other beings without scorning any means for the achievement of that ideal (*upāyakauśalya*).[327]

In addition, Huntington points out the significance of the bodhisattva in understanding Nāgārjuna and the Mahāyāna: "The bodhisattva's universal compassion is both the highest expression of nonclinging and the living instantiation of the philosophical matrix in which it is cast. Without understanding the relationship of compassion,

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[327] Lindtner, 261.

nonclinging, and emptiness, one cannot appreciate the meaning of Nāgārjuna's thought or the true significance of Mahāyāna Buddhism."[328]

Wisdom and compassion are two major requirements for attaining a whole Buddhahood. In *MMK* 23:23, Nāgārjuna emphasizes the importance of understanding what wisdom is:

> Thus through eliminating the errors
> Ignorance is eliminated.
> When ignorance is eliminated,
> Such things as the actions are eliminated.[329]

William Ames points out that elimination of ignorance in this stanza does not mean to eradicate the real nature of ignorance: "Instead, it is the realization that all things, including even error and ignorance, lack intrinsic nature and do not exist as self-sufficient entities."[330] In addition, Ames claims that for Nāgārjuna, liberation or enlightenment is achieved "through a profound comprehension of their true nature which is their lack of intrinsic nature."[331] In other words, wisdom signifies the realization of the lack of intrinsic essence in all phenomena, that is, *śūnyatā*.

Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* (Precious Garland) further shows an ethics of compassion and wisdom in the Mahāyāna:

> The Mahāyāna has a nature
> Of giving, ethics, patience, effort,

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[328] Huntington, 124.
[329] Tsong Khapa, 466.
[330] William L. Ames, "The Soteriological Purpose of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy: A Study of Chapter Twenty-three of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies,* vol. 11, no 2 (1988): 15.
[331] Ibid., 16.

Concentration, wisdom and compassion,

How could it ever explain things badly? (380)

Others' aims are [achieved] through giving and ethics,

One's own are [achieved] through patience and effort,

Concentration and wisdom cause liberation

These epitomise the sense of the Mahāyāna. (381)[332]

Accordingly, to achieve the highest enlightenment one should realize the emptiness of all phenomena and practice the bodhisattva path with compassion: "To some he taught doctrines based on non-duality, to some he taught what is profound and frightening to the fearful, having an essence of emptiness and compassion, the means of achieving [the highest] enlightenment."[333] In "Hymn to the Inconceivable [Buddha]" in *Catuḥstava* (The Four Hymns), Nāgārjuna emphasizes the relation between the realization of *śūnyatā* and the bodhisattva's wisdom and compassion:

I bow down to the inconceivable, incomparable [Buddha] whose cognition (*jñāna*) is unequalled [for] he has preached that [all] dependently born things lack own-being.

Just as You in Mahāyāna personally understood the selflessness of phenomena, accordingly You have, under the sway of compassion, demonstrated it to the wise [bodhisattvas].

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[332] Jeffrey Hopkins, Lati Rimpoche and Anne Klein, eds and trans. *The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1975), 74.
[333] Ibid., 76.

> You have stated that [all that] has arisen from conditions is unoriginated. You have declared that it is not born through own-being (*svabhāva*), and thus it is empty. [334]

In addition, in his letter to King Gautamīputra, the king of Andhra in south India, not only does Nāgārjuna claim the significance of *śūnyatā* and non-attachment ("O best of men, since everything is impermanent, devoid of self, refugeless, protectorless, and homeless, free your mind from *Saṃsāra* which is like the pithless plantain tree")[335] but he also stresses the concept of Buddhahood through practical paths: "Having rejoiced in the virtues of all (living beings), having also dedicated your threefold good conduct to the attainment of Buddhahood and having mastered the whole of yoga, then you will have countless births in the realms of gods and men through this heap of merit."[336]

To attain perfect awakening and benefit all beings, the practice of the six or ten perfections (*pāramitās*) of the bodhisattva path is required: the perfection of generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation, wisdom, skillful means, the vow, the powers and knowledge. The first six perfections are considered the main disciplines, while the last four perfections are additional.[337] Among the six perfections, the perfection of wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*) is the supreme doctrine in Mahāyāna Buddhism. While the first five perfections refer to altruism and compassion of a bodhisattva, *prajñā-pāramitā* implies *śūnyatā*. Har Dayal emphasizes the importance

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[334] Lindtner, 141.

[335] Lozang Jamspal, Ngawang Samten Chophel and Peter Della Santina, trans. *Nāgārjuna's Letter to King Gautamīputra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 35.

[336] Ibid., 65-6.

[337] Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932), 167.

of this sixth perfection: "this *prajñā-pāramitā* is the essence of the Mahāyāna and is even sufficient by itself without the other Perfections. It produces, maintains and promotes them all. This *prajñā-pāramitā* is understood to mean *śūnyatā*."[338] In other words, without full awareness and understanding of *śūnyatā*, we cannot imagine the achievement of the bodhisattva path. With its emphasis on the doctrine of *śūnyatā*, the Mahāyāna becomes a new vision of or movement towards a higher goal, not only of enlightenment but also great compassion and responsibility to all sentient beings who are still on the path to the bodhisattva.

Derrida's deconstruction is a philosophy which dismantles Western metaphysics or more exactly, demonstrates its illusory ground like a sand tower, using deconstructive devices, *différance*, the trace and the middle voice. Moreover, his deconstruction leads to a new understanding of ethics which redefines itself without metaphysical thinking and shifts its interest from ontology to non-ontology. This new shift to non-ontology opens the concept of responsibility to other human beings because there is nothing outside contextual and inter-human relationship.

Nāgārjuna's philosophy in the *MMK* shows the highest value of *śūnyatā* and equates it with other Buddhist doctrines, dependent arising and the middle way. Moreover, he emphasizes the significance of the two truths for understanding everyday life. Nāgārjuna undoes the ontological view prevailing in ancient Indian philosophy, including the Buddhist Abhidharma tradition, through the concept of *śūnyatā*, namely the lack of intrinsic nature of all phenomena. More radically, he deconstructs any substance of *śūnyatā* through *śūnyatā*. Just as Derrida's

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[338] Dayal, 237.

deconstruction ultimately aims at the expansion of a new horizon of ethics in non-ontological territory, the highest value of Nāgārjuna's philosophy as the concept of *śūnyatā* eventually leads to the ethical movement of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Consequently, we find similarity as well as difference between Nāgārjuna and Derrida in their deconstructive and non-ontological philosophies. Furthermore, their philosophies lead us to rethink human relationship, that is, responsibility or compassion in the ethical area.

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